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M. D. Waung





BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ZOË THE DANCER

THE BODLEY HEAD

## HOUSE-ROOM BY IDA WILD

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# BOOK I AT MENNA'S CAMP



#### CHAPTER I

HE garden of Menna's Camp is without its equal in Bandishire for interest. The house stands back only thirty yards from the road, and is fronted by a neat lawn, path, and flower-borders; behind it, a larger lawn, more paths and wider borders make up the flower garden. This changes up the hill into a meadow, bounded in the far distance by a thick hawthorn hedge. The meadow is properly down-land; the soil is chalky, the grass short, and scabious, hawkbits and bluebells flourish in it. Midway between the edge of the garden and the limit of the meadow stands a huge solitary stone, bolt upright some twenty feet out of the ground, five feet broad, three feet thick, and thridden some four or five feet from the top with a circular hole fifteen inches in diameter. It is called Menna's Stone,



and is said to date from Roman times, from Druid times, the Stone Age, Atlantis. No two people agree on its age or its origin. The name of the field where it stands is rightly Menna's Camp, but it is locally called no more than The Camp. Who Menna was cannot be determined; his Camp or field and his Stone are all we have of him. The field is some four acres in extent, running rather steeply up a rounded hill on one side; the bordering hedge follows the hilltop vaguely.

The Stone is made of igneous rock, and scarcely weather-worn. It is almost black, except towards the top, where it has light-grey patches on one side. Its regular form and its position are as striking as its enormous size. It must be buried as deep again to have withstood centuries of storm, frost and earth-changes without toppling over. The hole, or thirl or drill, as it is variously called, looks east over the meadow, and it is supposed that another Stone some eight or ten feet high stood due west of the large Stone, from which station the sun could be seen rising exactly in line with the thirl at some sacred season of the year. Two mighty lumps of stone, one just under six feet in length, lie in the garden; they are obviously broken, but not matching; some piece is

missing, and their present position is meaningless. They seem to have been moved out of the way of the circular lawn end, where clipped box outlines the grass. If this station had not been moved, it is said that a very fair guess at the Stone's age might be made. As it is, the learned wrangle over thousands of years, some contemptuously assigning only thirty centuries to it, and some claiming as many as two hundred.

It is the only monument of this kind in the county, the furthest east in all England. Westwards you will find Stonehenge, the lord of all monuments: the Avonmouth Stones; and a number of them in Devon and Cornwall, most of all in the latter country, where they are almost common. Their frequency there and in Brittany gives colour to the Atlantean theory in the eyes of some. If Scilly is the last morsel of Atlantis to survive, the rest being submerged, it is likely enough that the Atlanteans came east past their own high hills to the yet higher hills of this country to explore, or trade, or more probably still, to find non-volcanic land where they might set up places of worship; for so they are, we believe, since men will not go to such vast labours for trivial ends, and to early man religion was life. We make our monuments for religion or pride or honour now in a petty scheme, carving our own poor copies of Nature, or worse yet, images of our own selves in stone that fritters away, or moulding them in bronze, or like Horace setting them down on the lips of men. These enormous Stones from their very bulk and simplicity withstand time as Nature's own face has not withstood it.

From the centre back door of the house, two paths branch about the oval lawn and join again to lead on to the meadow; there the gravel abruptly ends, but much stepping has trodden a well-marked continuation of it right up to the Stone.

Up and down this track, on the first Thursday in August, a girl was walking. Whenever she came to the Stone, she touched it with her hand or pressed her body against it lightly, but without attention, evidently carrying out some regular ritual. She stared at the ground as she strolled, absorbed with thought of a pleasing nature, for she smiled a little. When she was in the act of turning towards the house on one of her journeys, she saw a woman coming up the garden towards her.

"I can't make them hear in the house," the new-comer called out. "I've been ringing for ten minutes. I've brought the creases." She came up to the Stone, bawling this message at the top of her voice, although she and the girl were now within arm's-length of each other.

"Well, they are all in, I'm sure," said the girl. "But they're busy packing. We start to-morrow. But if you like to call in regularly, or send someone along if you can't, perhaps the people who are going to be here would buy some."

The woman sat down on the edge of her basket and sighed. She was advanced in pregnancy, and her face was drawn and covered with sweat.

"Who's starting on a Friday?" she asked.

"We are, Friday or no Friday. I told you the other day, Melia. We are going for six weeks to the seaside. We are starting first thing, and the other people are coming in directly after. Are you ill, Melia?"

"No, a bit poorly, that's all. I feel the heat badly nowadays, and the basket was heavy.... It soon passes off. I wear too much clothing, I believe... You aren't off to-morrow, Miss Virginia, I know you are not."

She said this with a calm certitude which annoyed Virginia Mommery. Amelia was known to be one of the few remaining "wise women" of that part of Bandishire. A wise



8

#### HOUSE-ROOM

woman nowadays is nothing more than some practical and experienced old person, who can preside at births and deaths with dignity and usefulness. To this some of them take a very library of superstitions and sayings, more than half of which come true, because they are founded on unexamined observation. county superstitions are as reliable as scientific facts, for the most part, for they are collected from the same sources and by the same intelligences; but some are reduced to proof and are readily demonstrable, while others are mere statements without visible foundation. one who has had to deal with the superstitious country people will either utterly despise or wholly believe their prophecies. But the proportion of truth to falsehood is large in the long run.

Amelia was of the wise woman class, but she had other qualities which many have not, and which defy explanation, except the easy explaining of the ignorant. She had a curious power of foretelling, the seer's power; she was wrong as often as right: but that leaves a proportion of fifty per cent of correct forebodings, which it is difficult to clear away by the covering term of "coincidence." Naturally, she was never half trusted, as a person sometimes to be

relied on. Either people believed her utterly, and were ready to falsify Nature herself to defend Amelia, or they were (particularly the so-called "educated") beforehand in decrying everything she said, and would accept none of the veridical instances of her powers. She had visions; she saw things in water; she heard voices; she had spasmodic intuitions; she was sibyllic;—in a word, she had all the ways and mannerisms of all prophets and seers throughout history. To-day she would be called a psychic. At that time she might have been, if anyone in her part of the world had known of such things, or if she had gone to London. Where her equals are living still, they are either spoilt by mercenary motives, which make charlatans of them, or are intimidated by "superior" intelligences to hide their powers.

Thundery weather always increases the peculiarity of such persons; any physical discomfort has the same effect. At most times moody and self-contained, Melia was worse when near her confinement. She had had four children—all of whom had died before they were a month old, strong at birth, but decaying rapidly to the weakly and unfit state of their parents, and less able than they to fight the world.

10

#### HOUSE-ROOM

Virginia Mommery was not of the superstitious class. Education with her had been liberal enough to dismiss the lurking desire after the mysterious that lives in all of us, but not liberal enough to replace it with knowledge. She had contempt for poor Amelia's psychic ways, while she liked her for herself, and pitied her for her sufferings. It always amazed Virginia that a woman should go through so much again and again and have nothing to show for it. Mrs. Mommery had had two children born dead. Virginia thought this foolish perseverance, but it was an idea not to be expressed.

She had not answered at once after Amelia's prophetic remark, but had leaned on the Stone, staring thoughtfully into the garden.

"Why shall we not?" she asked at last, without excitement.

"I don't rightly know. But you won't—I see that. . . . I've brought the week's creases," Melia added, in a different tone.

Virginia would not condescend to force the subject. She led the way to the house, carrying the basket herself, and left Melia in the kitchen while she went up to her mother.

"It is Amelia with the watercress," she said.
"I told her to call in while we are away."

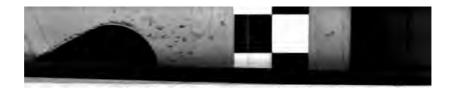
Mrs. Mommery was folding clean white paper to fit drawers. She was a red-faced woman of fifty-two, still well shaped, and holding herself erect. When her daughter came in, she looked up astonished. "Melia herself! My dear! I wonder she cares to be about, and such a close day. Where is she now?"

"In the kitchen, putting it out on the table. I haven't paid her yet."

Mrs. Mommery started up, fussing a little in her movements. "No, I'll pay her. And you get on with the papering. I've done all in that chest but the bottom two drawers."

"Mother, she says we are not going tomorrow," Virginia said. "She seems quite sure about it; and I think she is going to be bad soon, for she's funnier than ever in her manner."

"Quite likely, yes, yes," Mrs. Mommery answered, stopping at the door. The announcement of the prophecy had a far greater effect on her than on Virginia. She was of the old school which had had no education of a mental sort at all, and her experience told her that these statements of the wise women very often came true. She stood rolling the door-mat under her foot for a moment, then she bustled down the stairs.



12

As a rule she was quiet in movement, inclining to be dignified; but the bother and stir of moving away had upset her, and she was wasting the accumulated nervous energy of years in a few days' work.

Virginia stayed to finish the work her mother had left; she folded the last sheets of paper and lined the drawers neatly. Her upbringing made her promptly clear away the rest of the paper and any little scraps of untidiness; her natural sinfulness made her hurry to throw up the window and lean out of it, staring through the narrow front garden into the silent road. She was as excited as her mother, but showed it less.

Mrs. Mommery had been widowed thirteen years, and had never, in all that time, taken a holiday of more than a week away from Menna's Camp. Every summer she had given Virginia a week's change at the seaside, and occasionally three or four days in London. But to take a definite holiday of six weeks away from her own home, and to leave that home in the care of strangers, was a great deed for her. She had been led to prepare for it by the betrothal of two of her nieces, who both unexpectedly found husbands at a seaside watering-place within a month of each other. To be sure, neither of the matches was much to boast of, one being a

curate and the other a clerk on three hundred a year; but then neither were the nieces of the first quality in looks or otherwise. In Hurst there are no men at all, no curate, no clerks, except married ones. Only two eligible men live within five miles of Menna's Camp; one a dissolute farmer, whose character in the country makes him avoided by all decent persons, and the other a hump-backed property owner, excluded on account of his infirmity.

In her own youth, Mrs. Mommery had travelled a good deal, as they counted it in those days. She had been to Italy, had learnt to speak French in a Belgian family, and had been again and again to Berlin and Dresden. But her present income did not allow of her sending or taking her daughter to such distant places; it would not have been possible for her to take this mild six-weeks' husband hunt, if the Camp had not been let for the whole of the time at a very fair rental. Virginia deserved an effort being made for her. She was unexacting and a good companion, a hard worker in the house and on the little home-farm. In the early part of the year Mrs. Mommery had begun to pay her a small fixed salary, and Virginia had the feeling that her life was once and for good settled. She was sorry that it did not lead to

14

greater things, but with a countrified simplicity and content she went on without demur. It was when she had reached this stage of placid satisfaction that Mrs. Mommery conceived the plan of unsettling both their lives.

A life of small duties and small rewards in kindly company cannot easily be bettered. To Mrs. Mommery it was as nothing in comparison with the normal woman's life—marriage and motherhood. Her sole object in uprooting them both for so long from their parterre and entrusting their household gods to strangers was to give Virginia a chance to get married. They had booked rooms at the same watering-place where the nieces had had their great success, and where their relations had a circle of acquaintance.

The Camp had been let, the arrangements for going all finished, and the next day, Friday, the Mommerys were to go out of their home and leave it to a Mr. Neace and his son, one elderly and one afflicted with nerves, who were to bring their own servants with them. The train which was to take the ladies from Hurst would bring the gentlemen to take their place.

#### CHAPTER II

RIDAY morning was dull and unsettled. It was early in August, and for a fortnight the weather had been clear and warm, with a cool breeze at nights. with the change of the moon three days past, the clouds set in over and the whole aspect of the place was altered. Throughout the house it was difficult to get air, and the garden felt stifling, wedged as it was between the house and the slope up of the field. Mrs. Mommery and Virginia had been up early to finish their packing and to leave the house perfectly in order for their visitors. Their train was due to go at eleven, and they had arranged to have a very early lunch or a very late breakfast, before the fly called to take them to the station. Jessie, their one servant, was to stay until the visitors were settled in, and then to go to her own home a few miles away.

As the time for their starting drew near Virginia began to share her mother's fussiness. She fidgeted about doing unnecessary little

jobs, and the two got so often into each other's way that they began to fear a tiff. Virginia ran out into the garden under the pretext of looking for mushrooms on the lawn, and her mother went upstairs to have a last glance round. There were no mushrooms to be found, and Virginia naturally came to the Stone for a rest; she was sitting there when Jessie threw up one of the windows and called to her in a gasping, frightened voice. Horror is easily communicable, and Virginia fled towards the house in a state of complete fear, unconscious of the sultriness which had fatigued her a minute before. As soon as she was inside the door she heard her mother groaning, and ran up to find her lying with all her weight on a twisted foot. The old lady had been peering about for something to do, and had stood on a chair to put a curtain unnecessarily The floor was over-polished, the chair had slipped, and Mrs. Mommery was not lively enough to jump aside.

Virginia and Jessie raised her on to the nearest bed, torturing her by their ignorant way of carrying, and then, while Virginia tried to ease the foot by cutting away slipper and stocking, the maid ran for the cart and the doctor. When she had gone, Mrs. Mommery grew quiet, and Virginia started to undress her. The girl was not awkward in ordinary things, but at this work she seemed absolutely incapable; Mrs. Mommery was wrenched, screamed violently and fainted. Virginia was more at her ease in this complaint. She took away the pillow, and threw cool water—there was none cold to be had—on to the sufferer's face and neck. Presently the poor creature revived and could swallow a few sups of the water, but she became conscious only to scream and groan again. From Virginia's point of view it was better to have her in agony than silent and apparently dead.

Mrs. Mommery was nervous of Virginia's touch; she herself managed to take off her dress and stays with less pain than the girl had caused her. "Now fan me, Jenny," she said. But the fanning could not cool her. "It's no good," she said again; "put water on my neck and chest and then fan me." This was better; Virginia exhausted herself with her vigorous fanning, until the very curtains of the windows swang. Her mother looked a little more comfortable. "No holiday now, Jenny," she said, with a wry smile.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Poor, poor mother!"

<sup>&</sup>quot;This was what Melia said, you know," Mrs.

т8

#### HOUSE-ROOM

Mommery went on; "and it serves us right for starting on a Friday."

Virginia usually argued against such superstitious remarks, but now she was silent, partly because she did not wish to annoy her mother, and partly because she was herself greatly struck with the truth of Amelia's prophecy.

The doctor was of that cheery sort of people who make some hardened invalids feel better for their presence, but irritate the well. Directly he was in the room, Mrs. Mommery began to brighten, and stopped her moans; while Virginia grew more depressed than ever. He had a manner as invigorating as a musichall comedian, and kept up a run of much the same sort of patter. On this occasion, it was necessary to keep his patient as interested as he could while he set her foot as near right as he could manage.

"Now, that's fine," he said at length. "And what a time to choose for a thing of this sort! You and Miss Mommery just starting for a holiday, people coming into the house at any moment, and me as busy as three men with a new citizen!"

"A new baby! Is that Mrs. Cradock's?"

"Please don't put any such idea into the head of the Fates. I have no time to look after Mrs. Cradock until Monday at the earliest, whatever happens. No, this is Mrs. Jelly."

" Melia?"

"Amelia. A very nice little girl too."

"Oh, how I hope it will live!" cried Mrs. Mommery. "Can't you do something to make it live, Doctor?"

"She says it is going to live, and she is generally right about such things," the doctor said.

"She said we were not going to leave to-day, and she was right about that," Mrs. Mommery said. "I wonder how it is."

The noise of the gate's opening disturbed them all. The doctor went down with Virginia to explain to the new-comers. There was a time of bustle and confusion, in the midst of which Virginia was able, woman-like, to get a very good idea of the two strange men. Once the accident had been described, the situation explained, and the protestations that their arrival would make no difference received, the visitors became friendly. The doctor's going made them more so, and by the time that lunch was set on the very cloth that Virginia and her mother had been going to use, they were as intimates in the house.

Virginia took a tray up to her mother's room,

20

#### HOUSE-ROOM

but the poor lady could not eat. She lay and sipped water until it gave her discomfort, and from time to time groaned as softly as she could, so as not to annoy her visitors. In the intervals of her pain, she discussed the immediate future with Virginia, and finally sent her down to the garden to tea with the strangers, to talk over her plan with them.

Tea was set on two little tables just behind the house, in case it should rain and it would be necessary to run in with the things. The two men had walked down to the Stone and were standing with their backs to the house, so that they did not see Virginia arrive. She had a good few minutes to look at their backs before they knew she was there, and could make out a host of characteristics from this study. She was struck by the likeness there was between father and son. The father was white-haired and stooped a little, the younger man had black hair and stood straight, but in both the pallor, whether from age or disease, was the same, and the brightness of eyes and firmness of mouth. When they turned to come to the tables, she noticed that they walked alike, they smiled alike, they showed the same gentle deference to her. She had been impressed at their coming by their courtesy to her and to their servants. It was only natural that they should feel their position a little difficult, and they were ready to leave as soon as they could make arrangements elsewhere. But Virginia had come to ask them to stay.

"Mother has thought it all out," she said, "and she will be very glad if you will stay on. All we shall want will be that room she is in, and the one next to it, which I shall use. Jessie can sleep in the village."

"Not at all," said the old gentleman. "If Mrs. Mommery will really be content for us to stay on, we might dismiss one of our servants, and so make room for yours. Would that be better?"

"It would be very much more convenient," Virginia answered. "You will have the house practically to yourselves, except the kitchen, of course. And the rent you will pay must be reduced." She had no false shame about money-matters, since she had had so little to do with money; and she went into this question with a directness which pleased the two men.

Virginia was thoroughly sick of being in the stifling bedroom; she lingered in the garden with her visitors, and talked about the Stone. When it was time for her to go back to see to



22

the invalid, she went with regrets, and was delighted to make the further arrangement that she should take her meals with the visitors.

The day had seemed weeks long; a new life had begun in it for all of them.

#### CHAPTER III

HE house standing behind the Stone, which clearly faces East, was of Tudor times, very stoutly built in the lower part, with modern additions to the side and above, none dating beyond William of Orange, however. It had been built by the Mommerys or Mumries of Bandy and had never left their family. On one occasion, the only child of the house was a daughter, and by deed poll gave her name to her husband and children. That was long since, and the same extremity had been reached again at the time of my story. Alfred Mommery had died before a son was born to him, leaving one daughter, a girl then of eleven years of age. He was the last male of the name. His sister Philippa Olivia was of an unmarrying type, who had reached the age of fifty single. To carry on the line, his daughter Virginia must marry and keep her own name. This was a foregone conclusion; Virginia understood it from the earliest years of her mother's widow24

#### **HOUSE-ROOM**

hood, and acquiesced in it as in an edict of Nature.

Mrs. Mommery was not rich. Her husband's family had been possessed of a vast fortune at one time—according to themselves; but no one could account for its disappearance, and no definite period was given when it was supposed to have disappeared. Probably it never existed; families do not mislay hundreds of thousands of pounds without some inkling as to where they are; and although the Mommerys were always a careless crew about most things, untidy and disorderly, they were particular enough when it came to money-matters. Their family was one of the old Bandishire ones; the name appears in many a fusty old manuscript, right back to the Domesday Book, never spelt twice alike. It is impossible to link up the references to make one family—that is, impossible for a commonplace mind. Antiquarians have done it, and dragged every name that looked remotely like it from every unlikely spot to help them through. Thus we are told that Robt. Nome of Ledsy is a mistake in a charter for Richd. Mommery of Hurst. Robert for Richard is not difficult to understand, and Nome has a look of Mommery; but how Ledsy, which surely stands for the

modern Lessey, comes to be Hurst is not so clear. On the mistake hypothesis this is soon explained, however, and the Mommerys triumph. In this convenient manner, pretty well every family in the county has been robbed of its rights to antiquity to help the Mommerys along. But since the others have robbed too, or the antiquarians have done it for them in exactly the same way, no harm has been done, and inestimable advance has been made, you will agree, in the study of our old records and history.

It is perhaps not out of place to state here that one antiquarian, jealous for a family called Mansell in the East, sank so low as to declare that the Mommerys were not ancient at all, and were simply some French Montgomerys, going back no further than ten sixtysix. This may be so; at any rate it does not affect my story. That date, modern as it is, gives the Mommerys several centuries in which to learn English and to build a good house, which they had done. It gave them time to accumulate and fritter away any number of fortunes before my story began; but, as I say, it is not likely that they ever possessed more than a competency.

Mrs. Mommery had scarcely that. When her

26

husband died, his four hundred a year, out of which he must keep his sister Philippa Olivia, was divided. Half and the house and land came to Mrs. Mommery for her life, afterwards to be Virginia's, the other half with his mother's jewellery went to his sister. Mommery was the gainer, for there was not five hundred pounds' worth of trinkets, and it was certain that Miss Mommery would bequeath those to her niece. But two hundred pounds is not much to boast of, when there is a largish house to be kept up out of it, and a daughter to educate, dress and marry. Mommery was a careful keeper of her little income. Her small farm paid for itself and the labour it entailed, and there were no outside Her position was well enough expenses. assured to allow her to keep up dignity in the eyes of the County without extravagant entertainments, and it placed her at the head of the village and the immediate neighbourhood.

It was her hope that Virginia would marry money. She herself had been brought up with a good deal of luxury, and she disliked living within narrow means, but she did it and taught Virginia to do the same, to avoid debt and extravagance, and to keep careful accounts. The years of Virginia's growing up had been a

heavy burden. The girl had been sent to Bandiston Borough to a good boarding-school, and Mrs. Mommery had lived on half-rations all term-time to manage without debt. If Philippa Mommery had not been a generous and observant woman the plan could not have been carried through; but she came forward and offered to dress Jenny for those years, so that the girl was able to face her fellow-pupils in clothes as good as any there wore.

Philippa lived in Boiswood, eleven miles away. She had a little villa on the border of the town, and had worshipped her way into the innermost churchy clique. But she was not happy there, and it was tacitly agreed that as soon as Virginia had married she would go to live at the Camp with Mrs. Mommery. She was welcome at any time for her own self, and sometimes the thought of the economy it would be to have her there to share expenses almost led Mrs. Mommery to implore her to come; but she never did more than stay a few weeks in summer and over Christmas into the New Year. She was on excellent terms with both Mrs. Mommery and Virginia, and was eternally the slave of the latter for one mark of friendliness. When Virginia had put her hair up, she flatly refused from thenceforward to say "Aunt Philippa Olivia" or even "Aunty Phil," but declaring she was the equal of every grown-up now, started the name Flolly. It took twenty years off the old lady's age, and she played tennis again for the first time in Virginia's memory.

Flolly had been going to share the seaside holiday, and when her sister-in-law and niece had failed to appear in the through train at Boiswood, she had gone on by herself, and was settled comfortably in her lodging when Virginia's telegram came. Her devotion was not enough to make her hasten back to take up nurse's duty, though she wavered a little. If she had known the exact position of her niece, who was living unchaperoned with two gentlemen in the house, she would undoubtedly have scurried to Menna's Camp to save the situation, mild as it may seem to an outsider. Jenny was not altogether without guile; she wrote truthfully to her aunt, but carefully, and the lady took nothing but satisfaction from the letter-her sister-in-law mending steadily, insufferable heat at Hurst (it was delightfully breezy on the cliffs), and an old gentleman reading novels in the garden. No one would leave a holiday for so little reason.

# CHAPTER IV

HE accident happened, it will be remembered, early in August. Mrs. Mommery was a healthy woman and the sprain she had suffered did no more than keep her to her room for nine days; after that, she managed to get about in some ungainly fashion, and took up a few of her daily household duties again. They were restricted duties, of course, for the greater part of the house was occupied, or supposed to be occupied, by the Neaces. In reality, it was unused, for the two men kept to the dining-room, or the garden in fine weather, and were scarcely to be seen except when moving to and from their meals. Mrs. Mommery was glad enough that they were there, for the young man was exceedingly helpful to her; and if it had not been for his kindness in supporting her she would hardly have gone out of doors for days together. Virginia was certainly strong enough to help her mother up and down the two steep steps which led into the house, but she was as often

## **HOUSE-ROOM**

30

as not away or busy when the invalid wanted to move, and the young man was always at hand.

The two households had fused into one, and the Neaces considered themselves more in the light of Mrs. Mommery's guests than as her paying visitors. The arrangement was pleasant as well as economical; every one of the four participating in it found some new delight in it. The old people perhaps took their pleasure vicariously, but Arnold Neace and Virginia had theirs directly from each other's company. For the first time in either experience, these two were on intimate terms with a mateable person of the other sex. The result was foreseen by Mrs. Mommery on the very day she sprained her foot; she could not have managed it better (she afterwards thought) if she had slipped off the chair purposely. Almost every woman with daughters is a matchmaker; she was decidedly one, and had been bent on a matchmaking expedition when her accident happened. The Fates obligingly brought her success in spite of the changed plans.

By the time old Mr. Neace—himself no dullard at observation—had begun to have an inkling how things were going with his unconscious son and the partly conscious young lady, Mrs. Mommery had arranged everything in her mind's eye, seeing with that organ not only the prospect of a wedding, but also of the trousseau it would necessitate, and so far forward as to the offspring it would produce. She had nothing else to keep her amused, and it is saying well for her that she never stirred finger to bring matters about as she wished them to come. Perhaps she was prevented a little by her infirmity of gait; perhaps she knew that she could not better but might worsen things if she interfered; at all events, she was a passive onlooker. She had been through a good many love-affairs of her own and her friends, and recognised all the signs.

If she had nothing better to do than to speculate about the wedding, how are the young people to be blamed for not doing better than to fall in love? There were only a few odd jobs about the house for Virginia to do, and she was accustomed to spending all her leisure time off the farm and garden in long walks or in strolling and lying about on the Down. Arnold needed a good deal of exercise, and had come to this place to spend the most of his time out-of-doors. After the first week or so, he took his walks very often with Jenny, who could show him the beauties and interests of



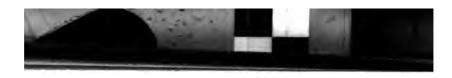
## HOUSE-ROOM

the neighbourhood better than any other person. At first, she had nearly over-walked him, forgetting that he was not in her sturdy state. He had been seriously bad with nerveswhich she naturally did not understand, as she was a bland and healthy girl. He had not been ill, in the sense of taking to his bed with a temperature, but natural delicacy had made it very easy for him to overwork mentally, and he had found himself unable to concentrate, and with a leaning to morbidity of thought. As with all nervous persons, he had been growing ill long before either himself or others realised his state, and when at last he had taken a doctor's opinion, he had been ordered to stop his work at once and set about getting well seriously.

He was part-owner of a small preparatory school for boys thirty miles north of London, in a swampy plain, and through his father's generosity he was able to leave a substitute there and come away for the perfect rest he needed. He rallied quickly in new conditions. In pleasant company, and released from the petty worries of school-life, he had, after three weeks' stay at the Camp, scarcely an outward sign of his illness. But this look of health was deceptive; he could walk and work with any

man, but he suffered from cruel depression whenever he grew tired. As soon as Virginia could be brought to understand this, she erred on the side of coddling him, which offended him a trifle, and put a slight barrier—which generally exists between the whole and the maimed—between him and herself. But before she could thoroughly take in what was the matter with him, that he could be ill and yet not in bed, he was better, and able to match her at exercise and exposure. Emulation or wounded pride may have done something to help him on; a man does not like to be pitied, or to be left behind, by any woman, however attractive and friendly.

Arnold was a beautiful character, one of those rare people whom the whole world loves. He was not gifted in any marked way, but he was no duffer, and could apply himself to learning intelligently. In matters demanding sympathy or insight, he was quick to understand and unfailing of help. This quality made him seem a little womanish to the average observer, but there was nothing weak about him. His looks were good; he was of more than average height, and when in health held himself well; his head was fine, the forehead a little high, but his hair fell over it and restored the proportion.



### **HOUSE-ROOM**

His expression was pleasant and inviting, without that guardedness which most English persons wear as an everyday look.

He was certainly a delightful companion for a girl so lonely as Virginia. He threw some indescribable charm on all whom he met, and before his pleasant tone and manner grumpiness, rudeness and discontent could not stand. Children and animals adored him, as they worship anyone who is wise with their wisdom, and he returned them a good deal of affection, having a weakness, he said, for anything smaller than himself. Jenny had met few men of her own class, and never one like him. At the beginning, she mistrusted the geniality of his manner because it was strange to her; but she soon fell under the charm he exercised and found pleasure in his lightest word. Long before autumn was well in, she was his slave, and could not be happy away from him. She was in love the first, but never showed it, and he gave every woman the idea that he was in love with her, from some knack of tender deference or melting look. He was used to having women in love with him, and hardly noticed the desperation of their case. But though he had come unscathed through twenty such encounters, the circumstances here were so propitious that he could not escape. Jenny was a different girl from the many he had met. She was unyieldingly truthful in all things, and not afraid to speak; this habit made her seem crude and advanced, and was enough to scare off any admiring gentleman. It encouraged Neace; he was attracted by the masculinity of it. He was truthful, but tactful; advanced, but never crude; and in all his adult life he had never wounded anyone in conversation. To talk to Jenny was to suffer a series of shocks, the force of them in inverse proportion to your own advancement: to talk to Arnold was to sail on a conversational sea, delightfully briskly, but without discomfort, dredging information and happiness all the way. The very qualities which endeared him to Jenny were those which he felt were his worst failings in her sight; her directness made him look insincere. She thought his tact made her appear vulgar.

It is the next step to mutual worship when parties begin to belittle themselves in comparison with each other. These two were continually together, and this stage was reached without its being noticed by either. It was not until Arnold had come to realise how much pleasure he felt in Jenny's company that matters could move on. His first act was to

beard his father in his bed, early morning. The old gentleman was sitting up against pillows, reading geology and sipping weak tea, and he neither put down the book nor left taking the tea as Arnold told him he meant to ask Miss Virginia to marry him. He had expected it for some time, but he expressed some genteel surprise, as befitted the occasion, and gave promise of his hearty approval.

"Yes, you will do very well to marry, particularly with a girl of her good sense," he said. "She is about three years younger than you, the difference on the right side. She has a great deal of sense, and ought to be able to look after your health better than you can, or than even I've been able to. I should think she is capable of pretty well anything, for both her mother and herself seem very sensible and delightful ladies. You know you will be required to change your name, do you, or don't you?"

Arnold knew nothing of that.

"The Vicar here told me the other day. And you won't be the loser, you know. There is no male heir to this property, and it appears that the last man, her father, has stipulated that her husband and children will have to be called Mommery, to carry on the line in that name. However, I should not object myself, if I were

in your place, as it means that you will come in for this place, and the Stone." He seemed to think that the possession of the Stone would settle it, but Arnold was not moved by the thought.

"Well, I don't know about objecting," he said, when his father had done speaking. "Plenty of women do it every year, and take ghastly names, some of them. If it's the same for them it's all right for me, I suppose. And it is not a bad name."

"Not at all. A very good old name, and well honoured. Oh, I think you are to be thoroughly congratulated on your choice. She will look after your health and see you don't over-work, and she will be there to distract your mind after you are worried or depressed, and what's more, she is quite capable of keeping an eye on your affairs generally. She keeps her mother's accounts very creditably."

Arnold took all this practical maundering meekly, but he rebelled against asking Mrs. Mommery's consent beforehand.

"We're not in Early Victorian times," he protested. "And I wouldn't dream of insulting a woman by treating her like a chattel. If she'll have me, she'll have me."

"And if she don't, she don't. Oh, she'll have

### **HOUSE-ROOM**

you right enough, Arnold." Arnold did not like this last easy comment. He went off to spend the day as best he might before proposing. Important matters of a tender sort cannot be broached early morning.

Jenny was out all day, ran in late to lunch and out again directly after. It was afternoon, clear and mild. The exquisite feeling of calm and health which autumn brings to nervous subjects was on Arnold; he had had a pleasant day of activity, working in the garden under Mrs. Mommery's direction. With her as guide, he had picked dead flowers off the dahlias, trimmed up other late plants to a respectable shape, scratched the borders neat, and put stakes to the chrysanthemums battered by rains. The exercise had been enough to make him feel perfectly well, without fatigue; and the solace which work among plants in the open air brings to every sensitive nature had made him glow and vibrate with well-being.

For two days Jenny had been busy in the village, carrying a monthly magazine for the Vicar to his parishioners. She had come home with her purse laden with coppers, and was now sitting writing out a list of money received, and that owing, to hand to the parson. It was a job she did not care for—particularly the

collecting part; for the people were not anxious to buy the paper unless their own christenings or other family festivals were printed in it; but it was the Vicar's wish that every communicant should buy it regularly. As he pointed out, the price marked on it was twopence, but where it was bought regularly by his church-goers, it was to be had for a penny; and this silly subterfuge his young lady parishioners, who were weak enough to hawk the papers round for him, were obliged to repeat to every unwilling villager. It took Jenny a day to dispose of twenty; and she had just returned from her second day's peddling with another fourteen pence bulging her pocket. Mommery had dozed off over her knitting, in her slumber letting the world at large see what she had been modestly hiding up all day long under her arm—the twin legs of a pair of combinations in bright pink wool, designed for her own winter comfort, but called a "shawl" when gentlemen questioned her as to what she was making. Old Mr. Neace had taken to the strip of stone-paved path under the windows, where, with a handkerchief spread over his knees, he was reading a novel by Samuel Richardson, and wondering whether he could stand another page of it. When he saw what



## HOUSE-ROOM

his son was doing, edging slowly up to Jenny's station, he decided that he could stand a whole volume more, rather than disturb the nervous wooer.

Arnold made several false starts. First he got to the Stone, but saw that Jenny was yawning; then he turned back, and was shocked and amused by the pink legs straddling over Mrs. Mommery's lap. Next he approached the Stone by a side path and was almost upon Jenny when she suddenly twiddled her fingers among the coppers in her lap, clinking them with the ever-cheering sound of money. This little tinkle had a dreadfully baulking effect on her wooer; he stopped as if frozen, and after a little pause turned back and went right into the house. His father ceased to pretend interest in Richardson and yawned with delicious freedom, then wondered what had sent Arnold away at the double. It was not Jenny assuredly, for she was still sitting under the Stone unmoved. The noise of the two-andtenpence in copper had recalled to Arnold the fact that one must have a good deal of money to marry on, and he had as little as possible. When he had got into the house, he dismissed this as a morbid thought, and went courageously back, careless of any form of specie. He was honestly in love, not in the noble way, which leaves a passion unspoken because the lover cannot offer his lady every luxury. He wanted Jenny for himself, and looked on her as a secondary character, to be consulted after his wishes were expressed. This is the commonest sort of love, and a very wholesome sort too.

If ever a woman was direct in her manner, Jenny was she. She did not understand the politeness that leaves things unspoken or slurs them over into untruths. But here on this occasion she belied her character, and pretended to a surprise and ignorance which did not exist. It put her at a disadvantage, and for that reason the scene stays untold. I want her to be heroic. She was often so, and I shall show her so; when she was commonplace and weak, I will tell you of it, but not how.

But love is blind, and men are naturally blind, so that her little villainy passed unnoticed as such. It seemed to Arnold delightful that she should be so astonished and unperceiving, particularly after his father's suggestion that she would be an easy conquest. Jenny grew ashamed of her attitude before long, when the excitement wore off, but she was wise enough not to test his idea of her greatness of character by confessing. A little secret here



#### HOUSE-ROOM

and there is nothing between engaged people, though in families it is not at all safe.

The proposal took place publicly, Jenny and her swain sitting in full view of the back windows of the house and of the old man in his chair. As he knew it was going on, he was discreet, but Mrs. Mommery was unaware of the great doings about her, and woke to an owlish stare at the wrong moment, just as Arnold had Jenny's hand in his. The old lady was still more than half asleep, and her eyes were incapable for the moment of showing her anything correctly; but her gaze, directed full on to them and very open-eyed, was disconcerting, and hurried the passionate avowals away at once. However, the main thing was over, and the two persons most interested were satisfied that they had done their best. After a little they strolled away to the top of the field, and would have disappeared to the shady hedge-side or the woods in the distant hollow, if the tea-horn had not blared out again at the delicate moment.

## CHAPTER V

HE first few months of married life are full of interest, but not wholly happy. All is unsettled, and each party to the contract feels a stranger at his or her elbow. This was a pair of lovers mated, but they found their life together hard at first. Jenny was too passionate, Arnold too yielding—their early experiences showed this again and again.

In Bandy at weddings, the older couples shake hands with the newly married pair and say their congratulations in this form: "We wish you a long life and a short family. The first year's always the hardest." You may hear this set speech for as many married couples as are present, but this is only among the country folk. The refinement of the upper classes keeps out the mention of any family whatever, and the possibility of anything hard in the years to come. Jenny had heard the old saying often enough, and thought of it often enough at the beginning of her life with Arnold, but they had gone through many hard times together before

## HOUSE-ROOM

she quoted it to him, and her giving it sound meant to herself that the worst times were over.

At the end of the first six months they were as happy together as when they were courting, and had fixed their happiness on a firm foundation of intimacy. Friendliness, community of interests, forbearance—qualities which must exist in any relation to make it sound—are as necessary in married life. If a man cannot feel brotherly to his wife, she may as well be single; and he may as well be dead if she does not feel motherly to him. These everyday qualities are developed in any intimacy; mother and son, father and daughter, brother and sister, master and servant, officer and man, must grow to feel in the same way or their house will fall. Why the Church and the State should step in to sanctify and legalise them in one particular relation you may understand. The old excuse of the "sake of the children" has not much point in the childless marriages which are fashionable nowadays. But that does not matter here. Right feeling supplies the sanctification of marriage, as it does of every relation; without it, the intimacy is a cheap thing.

When the strangeness of married life had worn off, and the consequent dullness had given place to renewed interest, when friendliness had joined, not supplanted, passion, they felt themselves for the first time really married, and could rejoice in one another. They saw a good deal of each other. The old gentleman had given up his part of the little house he and Arnold had been sharing, and had gone away on a rambling journey in Europe to be indefinitely prolonged. The cottage, for it was scarcely more, although its windows were respectably large, stood only two hundred yards from the Schoolhouse, its garden adjoining the playing-field; and Arnold came home for his midday meal from one to two, and for good at half-past six. Jenny liked the school-life. As she sat in her window or worked in the garden she enjoyed having the boys at play near her, and she often made informal advances to the little rascals who drove balls among her cabbages and came with shy excuses to ask for them again.

She found the life lonely, however, after the many interests she had had at Menna's Camp. Mrs. Mason, the wife of Arnold's partner, was a silly proud woman, exasperatingly formal and reserved, without anything important to reserve, and she made Jenny uncomfortable whenever they met. At Menna's Camp, the girl had been somebody, and had had a high

# 46 HOUSE-ROOM

position in the neighbourhood; here she had no importance whatever, and would not be content to hang on to the greater individuals, or to form part of a church clique, as Mrs. Mason did. Virginia carried out her part in the social game punctiliously, but she would not be intimate with second-rate persons, and the first-rate ones would not be intimate with her, so she was left very much to herself. Still, she consoled herself, better alone than in poor company, and she was all the more devoted to Arnold, her little house and garden, and to her mother in letters.

At Easter, she and Arnold went to the Camp for a few days. Jenny had felt sickly for a little while, and had been really unwell for more than a week, with that immovable depression that comes to full-blooded people in spring-time, and she thought the brisker air of Menna's Camp would set her up. It was a rainy season, warm and relaxing in the Midlands, and the flats where the Schoolhouse stood were enclosed by low hills, so that the place was never bracing. There had been heavy rains in the South too, but it was fresh up on the Down. Within a day of getting back, Jenny felt better, and cheered up altogether. She spent the first few days walking about in the soaking rains on the

springy downland, laying in a store of fresh air, as she said. When she felt recovered, she set out to pay a series of calls all over the village, and to taste again the pleasure of being a lady of importance. House after house she visited, exercising her memory as to the names of the children and the maladies of the elders, and made few mistakes in either case. It had been her habit on such occasions, when she had no particular reason to hurry home, to drop in last at Amelia Jelly's to have tea with her. At the end of the day, therefore, she decided that she would not bother to walk back to Menna's Camp before having her tea, but tapped at Mrs. Jelly's door and entered.

The wise woman was sitting before the fire with her child on her knee, waiting for the kettle to boil.

"I've come for a cup of tea," Jenny said. "Give me baby. There now, what a fat lump she is!" Amelia handed over the baby gladly enough.

"I got to get this firewood bundled by eight this evening," she said. "I'll go on till the kettle boils, if you'll hold her." But after this, Melia was not communicative, settling to her work in a moody way. She was not in one of her weird fits, but on the border of one, it seemed to Jenny. The baby was entertainment enough, however, and Jenny played games suited to the intelligence of nine months to her own delight as well as to the baby's. When the kettle had boiled and the tea was drawing, Amelia began to talk of the changes there had been in the village since Jenny's leaving, and became as gloomy as she possibly could on the number of deaths of the past winter.

"And they aren't all over yet," she said. "I see mourning and tears again, and only last week in my tea I see a rich funeral."

"Whose?" Jenny asked.

"How can I tell? But I can read the signs. There will be dark days for the children to come, and little ones clothed in black."

"At the Vicarage?" Jenny cried. "Do you mean the Vicar? Is he ill? Who is ill there?"

Melia refused to be explicit. She could smell death and see it in tea-grounds and the way the grass turned in the graveyard, but could not state anything definite about it. She drank huge quantities of tea, still tying her firewood, and grew more lugubrious. Jenny prepared to go.

"And you are going to have a child too," Amelia said.

"I hope so. I don't know," Jenny answered,

hardened to this subject since her return to the village.

"Well, I wish you luck and a good time," Amelia said, in an ordinary voice; and then, with a burst of sense, "Loose clothing and plenty of lime in your food," she added.

"Yes," said Jenny, "I'll remember."

"But there's worse to follow," Amelia went on, falling back into her witch-tone. "A wedding that comes of an accident will end in worse. Trouble brought you together, and trouble will part you. There'll be a load round your neck till the end of your days."

Jenny was painfully startled, but her common sense and upbringing helped her to master her excitement. "Why, Melia!" she cried, "how can you talk to me like that? You know perfectly well I don't believe your sayings."

"Believe 'en or not, he'll be hanging round your neck till the end of your days."

Jenny ended the scene by going out. She walked a long way round instead of going straight home to let the rain wash away the effect of Melia's words, but they were not so easily forgotten.

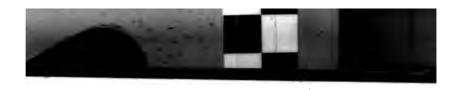


#### CHAPTER VI

HILDREN have the secret of happiness, and they have it almost to themselves; but here and there you will find a grown-up who has kept it in spite of the fight that circumstances have had to make him forget it. But if any of you will give a backward look to the days of purest happiness in your life, you will find the secret at once, though few of you will have the sense to keep hold of it. Life is a ding-dong, jog-along business for the ruck of us, and the few great days that can be counted are not the best ones. A picnic by the waterside,—spring convalescence, health and the year coming back hand in hand,—a blackberry foray,—on such trifling memories we rest when we remember our keenest joys. If you have no such days to recall you cannot have known happiness. Great events, fine clothes, operas, the receiving of gifts of value, worldly promotions, passing examinations with honours, or sitting on platforms with the elect—these are achievements, not happiness. Happiness

lies in the power to notice and enjoy trifles. The amassing of goods and wealth is not compatible with it; joy is on the heels of simplicity. For this reason the domestic affections are of better-wearing stuff among simple folk than among the educated; and than the passions of either class. Passions may bring ecstasy and go down to history, but they do not make happiness. Perhaps it can be found only by the application of mysticism, which is the triple essence of common sense. The mystic will tell you that happiness is at hand, here, to be grasped at once; but man, like the untidy beast that he is, has been for centuries at such a bother to find it that he has rummaged everywhere but in the right place, and piled so much on top of it that he will never find it for himself.

Country-folk both and living the quiet life of their fellows, in spite of their "superior education," Jenny and Arnold were unconcerned with their happiness and so in full possession of it. They worked hard—he at his teaching, she at her house and garden; their pleasures were unsought and without price; their whole existence was easy-going. They were each a little regretful privately that there was no child yet and no sign of one. Both loved children and had a deep sense of the



#### HOUSE-ROOM

duties of parenthood; and it was their desire to found a family. Jenny became at length resigned to the notion of having no children, and once she had done so, Amelia's prophecy came back to her. She remembered it with a laugh, as another instance of the witchwoman's wisdom gone astray. The first part false, the second would be false! She realised at once that she had been believing in it, if she needed to dismiss it now, and was angry with herself about the superstitious leaning. But the thought recurred often in her mind, and she began to recall many other occasions when Amelia's foresight had gone wrong—a storm to flood out Valwood, never made more than damp by rains; a death in the Wesleyan minister's house within the year, which had never happened at all; a plague among the sheep, which was afterwards translated by the wise woman to read as a poor grass-year. There were certainly dozens of instances where Amelia had been right, but her wildest flights of prophecy were generally proved wrong, except for a wonderful example here and there, which Jenny would explain by the coincidence hypothesis.

When she had mentally satisfied herself about the fallacy of Amelia's foresight, Jenny suddenly discovered that one of the prophecies at least was true. She was going to have a child. The melancholy that overtook her for the first few weeks of this changed state, when she could not eat and sleep in comfort, fed on the later part of the prophecy; but she soon had enough to do to occupy her thoughts and she forgot the future tragedy in the present pleasure.

Mrs. Mommery had come helter-skelter at the earliest news, charged with advice and knowingness; but she soon left, feeling that the young people had rather be alone at such a time. She left, however, ready to fly back at a moment's notice. The notice came suddenly. and ready as she was she arrived too late. Jenny had been ailing for a few days, not caring for exercise or food, and had hidden the fact from everybody. The child was born several weeks too soon, and both he and his mother were on the edge of death for days. He, poor mite, toppled in, and was out of the world before he should have been in it. Jenny crept slowly back heart-broken seemingly, and unable to rally her spirits. Arnold was as bad, failing in his obvious duty to cheer up himself and Jenny. The old lady had her hands full between the pair of them; she could bully him for moping, but Jenny she could only console, and that work was undone by Arnold as soon as he appeared

# HOUSE-ROOM

54

with a face as long as a fiddle. Nothing could liven him up. Jenny herself began to brighten before he smiled, for as her strength came back, her spirits revived and she could be comforted. Together she and Mrs. Mommery set to the task of bringing Arnold to reason. But he had fallen victim to his old complaint, and the anxieties of the last few weeks had hurried him to a state of mental collapse. With nervous energy he kept up against the full effect of the disease, but he had done wiser to give in. He was not a strong character; in health he might seem so, but some inherent weakness in him was given the upper hand in times of depression. He began the struggle for cheerfulness on his own behalf too late. The descent was gradual; those nearest him noticed it least. To add to his worries, his partner Mason caught a bad cold which left him voiceless for a little time. and the whole of the teaching fell on Arnold. This extra work seemed to help him, and Jenny was relieved to see him taking a feverish interest in the school again. But soon after Mason's return to work, Arnold's state defied concealment. Mason came in to tell Mrs. Mommery that things could not go on as they were. "Neace must rest, and give it all up for a time," he told her. "He talks to the boys of

despair and death, and frightens them all. It's impossible. He must get clean away. Why, I can't get a word of sense out of him to-day."

"He was bad once before," said Mrs. Mommery. "Before his marriage. How was it then?"

"Oh, nothing like, nothing like. He was all fidget then, and worn to a shadow with want of sleep and indigestion. That was just nervous worry."

"Nervous worry. Well, what is this?"

"Oh, this is far worse. He ought to be put under treatment."

The petty miseries and shames connected with a tragedy are not for reading. They strike home too straight with most of us; and while we can bear to recount the trivialities of other men's triumphs we are glad when the details of their downfalls are hidden.

Arnold was out of his mind. Not hopelessly so, it was said; care and change would perhaps restore him. He was not violent or obscene; his sweet amiability had not gone, but he lived in a cloud. All light and cheer seemed to be hidden from him; he was morose and fed on distress. His choice of life was to sit idly staring downwards, or to write incoherent semi-

religious letters to everyone he knew. The form of disease is common; he could twist everything to a religious meaning, and juggled with the Scriptures as well as a scholiast. At times he would become inspired and let some divine afflatus guide his hand; his productions under this assumed leadership were like all such —the similarity of such screeds almost forces me to believe in their common origin from one spirit mind, a spirit mind whose platitudinous and windy verbosity would disgrace the reporter on a local newspaper. You know the stuff: a weak trickle of blasphemy or its nearest relation pervades oceans of moral nonsense and Christmas-card-y description— Heaven is a place of silver baskets filled with lilies, of trumpets, and of the Blood of the Lamb; virtue is a matter of purity, kindness, gentleness under martyrdom, and wallowing love. All is sensual and conventional, stuffy and cryptic. Thousands of our fellow-Britishers swallow this brackish stuff week in, week out, and call it religion, or spiritualism, but always "inspired." Arnold's "superior education" made his use of this claptrap morality and circus ornament a little less fulsome than it generally is; he wrote beautiful passages sometimes, descriptive of things beyond material sight; but his piety and morality were no better than the bulk of such.

For days together he would write, refusing to eat until food was put between him and his composition, refusing to sleep until the pen was forced from his hand. After a few weeks of this, he had a bad fit, lay unconscious for over an hour and ill for a week. Then the doctors decided that he must be removed to a more bracing place.

Jenny refused to part with him. His father wrote urging it; she stood firm. Some of his intimates combined in trying to persuade her. Mrs. Mommery never suggested it, and Jenny, with her mother at hand, felt capable of bringing him back to reason. She engaged a male attendant for him, and found a cottage on the Heath to the south-west of Bandishire, a lonely place, where he might be nursed up and come to health in security.

# BOOK II ON HECKLEDON HEATH

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# CHAPTER I

ECKLEDON HEATH is the name of the place. It stretches over six hills and five valleys, nine miles from North to South, six miles from East to Westa barren, wild place, treeless, covered with heath and furze; uncultivated, uncultivable. At the foot of each valley gathers or springs a little moisture, and a green band of grass follows; no other grass is to be found in the whole area. Where the heather has been often burned, bracken grows fresh green in spring, and on spaces bare of heather a brilliant orange moss covers wide patches; but beside this, except for the few weeks that the gorse blazes, or the ling and heather bloom, the colouring is dull, blackish purple, night-tinted, and the sun can hardly lighten it.

Rare houses stand on the heath. On one high hill at its northern limit, wealthy persons have built a whole village of large houses, and cut a road from Mayhurst, the nearest station, to Seale, the nearest large town. But these are

#### **HOUSE-ROOM**

62

artificial products; the dwellers therein are not heathmen, and they know nothing of the heath. They paint it, hunt for white heather on it, go for desultory walks over it; but they are ignorant of its most public message. Of real heath-houses there are less than thirty—lying far apart, for it needs a large district to make a living on in these barren parts; and most of the dwellers there have commoners' rights. These rights descend in families; the mere occupying of a house on the common does not enfranchise. No rent used to be paid for these houses, which had been built without leave's being asked; later on, the Crown demanded and received a peppercorn rent. Jenny was asked fifteen shillings a month for hers. had a good-sized parlour, a kitchen, and four small bedrooms over. The former tenant had made besoms or brooms for his living, and the piece of ground enclosed about the cottage was well provided with sheds and lodges, where kindling and potatoes could be stored. These outhouses were all falling to pieces. Jenny had one made sound to keep stores in, for it was difficult to get goods regularly there.

The stress and change of their trouble was soon past, and Jenny and her mother were familiar with the contemplation of their future.

It was their settled intention to devote their two lives to the care of Arnold; whether Jenny had any hopes is uncertain—she herself did not know. Mrs. Mommery had none. her private opinion, her son-in-law was incurable. She belonged to the generation which had made no advance in treating mental disease, and she disbelieved the cures she had heard of. To her mind, to be once mad was to be mad for good and all, and there was an end of it. She knew that some persons had lucid periods, but they fell back, and she could not understand the possibility of their not falling back. But she felt that Jenny needed company, if not help, and took it as her duty to stand by the girl. She let Menna's Camp for a year as it stood, furnished, and went off to Heckledon Heath, that lonely spot, with no greater provision than her knitting, the complete novels of Dickens, Thackeray, Reade and Trollope, and her own kind heart.

Their difficulties then began in earnest—not the great matters, but the petty domestic details which make up existence. They could never be suited with a male nurse; apparently most of the men who undertake to attend mental cases are themselves afflicted by some disease or vice. One after another came into the cottage and left or was sent away; one drank, one could not stand the desolation, one was unwilling to do more than his nurse's work, one was in advanced consumption, one was dishonest, and one was absolutely brutal to his patient. All this chopping and changing was unsettling for poor Arnold; it was worse for the women. Jenny kept courageously on, searching for the right man; but it was five months before he was found.

Mortlake was his name, and he was a townsman, having been all his life in London, with a few trips abroad in service. He had been a butler in the best of service, as goodness goes by titles; and had been obliged to give up that work because of a bad facial disfigurement from burns. He was between forty and forty-five, a placid happy-natured man, with something of Arnold's lovableness about him. He was the right man, but Mrs. Mommery and Jenny were often afraid he would not think the place the right place. But he considered himself in luck to have found such a comfortable job in such a good family, as his appearance was against him in every post he had tried for. It needed only a few weeks for him to be the intimate and confidant of all. He was glad to be on that lonely heath; the desolation scared him often in broad daylight; at evening and in the dark he was in mortal terror, having been brought up among street-lamps and shop-fronts. But here there were none to stare at his mutilated face—the few people he met were of a tribe that sympathises if it notices, but never jeers at misfortune. Not even the heath children called out after him or giggled or so much as gaped, but passed "Good day" in the demure style of country youngsters.

He was fit to die of boredom at times, and used to sit unoccupied by Arnold by the hour at a time, while the patient was scribbling away—sheet after sheet of pious revelation. Mortlake was much struck by the beauty and correctness, from a moral point of view, of these compositions, and encouraged Arnold to write more.

"It is all so beautiful and right, madam," he said to Mrs. Mommery. "If the parsons would preach like that, the churches would be full. Have you read the one he wrote yesterday? It seems thoroughly inspired to me."

"I never read them. They sicken me," said Mrs. Mommery.

"Ah, but I didn't know Mr. Arnold before," said Mortlake with an inspiration of understanding.

The household was complete in the four, partly because of their few needs, and partly because of their desire to keep away from other persons as much as possible. To keep secret was their main object, and it was easy enough in that place. What population there was at hand was of working folk, who have little leisure for chatter.

Mortlake's urban limitations were of no importance except to himself. After his first misery of solitude had worn off, he was in a constant state of wonderment about the country. It was all new to him, and to Arnold and Jenny it was all familiar; but neither of them had lost that power of noticing which is the child's richest possession. Mortlake had had no childhood in a town; happily for him, he could assume it now that chance offered, and question and notice to his heart's content. A pleasant friendship grew up between him and Arnold, based on their twin interest in all around them. In the small cultivated patch behind the cottage, Arnold taught him to work, and together they broke up a scrap more ground for use. It was hard work, and neither of them was able to do much; together Mrs. Mommery and Virginia were as capable; but it kept them busy for a while every day, wet or fine. Arnold

had periods of restoration, when he was cheerful and willing for company, and during these times he would take Mortlake for long walks over the heath, giving him lessons as they went along in all about them. They plunged into botany, which fascinated Mortlake beyond measure, and what little Arnold knew about geology he taught him too. But to these days of good-fellowship would succeed the old fits of depression, when the patient would sit doubled in his chair refusing to stir or speak or read; this state might last for days; it would then gradually give way to activity, and the pious writings would begin again, until Arnold was writing all day long. Mortlake learnt to manage him in this latter condition, and would get him out on to the heath for exercise by asking him to repeat some of the stuff he had been writing.

Jenny and Mrs. Mommery took their turn at tending Arnold while Mortlake was sent out by himself, or sat and smoked in the kitchen. They made him responsible for fetching fresh provisions from a small farm on the edge of the heath, chiefly because they wished him to have regular freedom from his care. He might have made friends there if he had wished, but he was a trifle above his company in the country,

although he was attracted by the girls at the farm, one a dumpling little creature who took him hunting for eggs.

It was chilly early and late now, the sun not rising until after seven, and a good deal of rain falling two days out of three. Autumn had been shown on the heath by the withering of the bracken, but no further change would come now until it sprang again and new fingers put out on the furze. A rare robin heralds the winter there; all birds are scarce—small brown wrens the commonest, larks next, but few of any kind and at any season.

One clear afternoon Mortlake went out to fetch the goods from the farm, leaving Jenny and Arnold tidying up the garden. For some days Mrs. Mommery had been wrestling with a piece of knitting which she could not manage to her satisfaction; she sat now in the kitchen window, which was lightest, unravelling her previous day's work. When Jenny came near the window her mother called to her:

- "I'm undoing all the heel again. It's very annoying to have forgotten like this."
  - "Can't you find it in some book?"
- "Why, yes, of course I can, I never thought of that. I learnt it originally out of that old Enquire Within, you remember. Now where

is that?" She went off to look for the book, but could not find it. Jenny thought it might have got put away in a box of books that was now stowed in the store-lodge.

"If you'll throw me the keys, I'll have a look," she volunteered.

"Oh, no, never mind."

"But I'd rather, far rather, than see you muddling along like Penelope or someone."

Mrs. Mommery threw out the key, and Jenny began her search, first for the box and then for the book. After a little Arnold followed her in and stood watching her silently. She was a tidy worker, and instead of rummaging in the box, she unpacked it of pile after pile of books.

"What yards of books!" she said.

Arnold made no answer except to smile, but he moved forward and took up the first volume to hand. Presently he said in a commonplace tone, "Why! what a long time it is since I taught this! I mustn't forget my learning, eh, Jenny?"

She saw he had a small school-text of Cæsar in his hand. "No, indeed," she said cheerfully. "That would never do."

"I'm not likely to get rusty on Nature study.

Mortlake keeps me polished on that. But these

these—what you might call academical

studies, it would be quite easy to get rusty in."
He slipped the book in his pocket.

Jenny had now found the volume she wanted, and handed it to him. "Take that to Mother, will you?" she said.

He went off and stayed at the kitchen window to talk to Mrs. Mommery. Autumn was his best season in health, and now it was clear that he was decidedly better in mind since the heat of summer was over. Jenny finished in the lodge, and went back to her work. There were girasoles to be dug and washed. As soon as Arnold saw her digging again, he ran back to get his spade. Usually he was silent at his work, but to-day he talked.

- "I think we ought to keep an account of what we get out of the garden, and see if it would really pay a working-man to grow his own stuff."
  - "I haven't the least doubt," said Jenny.
- "No, nor have I. What I mean is, see how much he can save. Keep the book like a journal, expenses on one side and receipts on the other. We could price the stuff from the greengrocers' prices. Your mother would help there. Shall we?"
  - "Yes, we will, and see what we can save."
  - "Right. Because we ought to be as saving

as possible while I am ill and no money except that twenty-five a quarter coming in."

He had never before spoken lucidly of his illness, and never at all of their circumstances. Jenny replied:

"Our expenses are very little here, old boy, don't you worry. And Mother pays her share." She did not add that his father was paying Mortlake's wages and any doctor's bills.

Arnold seemed satisfied. He worked at his digging with a will, while Jenny shook the roots free from soil and threw them into a basket. Presently he began to expand his plan.

"We might put a few small-fruit bushes in, what do you think? They won't come to much, of course, any more than the vegetables do, but they'll be something of a change, especially as we get so little fruit in these parts."

Jenny agreed to buy a few. "Only if they are cheap," he reminded her.

- "Oh, they'll be about three shillings a dozen, not more."
- "Well, a dozen mixed then. Three red currants, three black, and three gooseberries."
  - "Four of each."
- "Four. Yes, I meant four, Miss Clever," he said with a laugh. Their work was done, and he put away fork and gloves, and they went in,

scraping their feet loudly on the iron mat at the door.

"Heavenly music" was his comment on this noise. He had been writing a screed about heavenly music only the day before, but he seemed to have forgotten that altogether. Jenny made no answer. Arnold went to the window with Mrs. Mommery, who had got no further with her knitting. She had been struck by Arnold's normal tone and manner when he brought her the book half an hour before, and had been watching him at work ever since. She had heard the remark at the door, and remembered with Jenny its possible application. When Arnold sat facing her with his bright look, she decided that the miraculous had happened—that he was cured; and for an instant she could do no more than stare.

"What is it, Mum?" he said.

"My horrible heel," she said, recovering at once. "I can't get on with it."

"Can't you find it in Enquire Within?" Jenny asked.

Mrs. Mommery took up the book and fidgeted slowly through the first contents page, her clumsiness exasperating Arnold.

"Here, let me," he said, and began the search in a workmanlike way. "What is it we want?

Cooking? No. Jenny, she was looking in Legal Advice for that old heel! Here you are —Knitting. To turn a heel, Scotch. To turn a heel, American. To turn a heel, exclusive. If it's for me, turn it exclusively, I beg."

Jenny went in to light the parlour fire. He left the book on Mrs. Mommery's knee, and ran in after her, and the old lady heard them struggling over the log-basket. It had been one of the fictions of their married life that Jenny must never lift anything, simply because she was a woman, and, in Arnold's idea, women were quite unfitted for any heavy work. This was a standing joke at the school in the old days, and Ienny, who was as hearty a woman as any in Great Britain, had had to give up carrying such trifles as even a loaded tea-tray, in deference to his superstition. Since his illness he had never taken interest in any of the well-worn family jokes, and this was the first occasion that he had remembered his old chivalry. The wrangle was still going on mirthfully when Mortlake came in the back way.

"He is himself again," Mrs. Mommery said to him breathlessly. "Listen to him now. Oh, Mortlake, do they ever get well—to keep well?"

Jenny and Arnold came back together as soon as she had spoken. Mortlake said: "No eggs,

#### HOUSE-ROOM 74

madam, but these three! I'm sure I don't know what has happened to the hens. They seem to have left off laying altogether!"

The others laughed at his ridiculous distress. Arnold cried, "Shocking! Incredible! However, it's nothing to get really worried about, Mortlake—they do it pretty well every year."
"Not in London, sir," Mortlake said, with

a smile.

"I wonder if we could get any from that heathman in the stone cottage along by the clump of pines. Green House they call it, I think. He has fowls. I might try," said Jenny. "I might go after tea."

### CHAPTER II

THE started as soon as she had drunk her tea, for there was not more than threequarters of an hour's daylight left, and the cot was over a mile away. She had walked within a hundred yards of it often, and knew the woman to pass "good day" with, though she did not know her name. The cottage was an almost exact replica of their own, made in rough stone, whereas theirs was in worked stone, and with a great deal more recovered land. A clump of pines stood to the west of it, making it dark early, and the usual innumerable ramshackle lodges were dotted all over the garden, some for hen-houses, some for pigs, some for wood, some for bracken: for whenever a heath-dweller wants a place to put one of his possessions, if it is only a couple of old lard-pails, he rigs up a lodge over it. Some of these lodges are warm little cubby-holes, made of heather and wood, and roofed with heatherthatched corrugated iron, but generally they are draughty leaky sheds ready to topple at a storm—disfigurements on the face of the land.

Jenny went round to the back door, which was open, and rapped with her knuckles. The woman was ironing, and called "Come in," without setting her hot iron out of her hand.

"Thank you. We can't get eggs," Jenny said, going in. "At least, not enough. Mr. Tremble lets us have them as a rule, but he's got so few hens."

"Ah, and they won't lay just now. Well, I've got eggs, but I've got reg'lar customers too, and I'll see if I can spare you a few. How many would you want?"

"A dozen, eighteen if you can."

"I might scrape up a dozen," the woman said. "Take a seat for a bit, and I'll see what I can do." She went outside to a lean-to lodge, and Jenny sat by the fire, and glanced about the kitchen. She was much startled to see sitting in front of her a girl whom she had not noticed until that moment, so over-furnished was the room. This girl was busy sewing, working apparently as much by the flashes of firelight as by the poor evening light filtering through the curtains and geraniums in the window.

"Won't you hurt your eyes?" Jenny said. The girl giggled, and with a sudden jerk tossed her sewing into Jenny's lap. It was a piece of white calico, backstitched in intricate meaningless patterns in red and blue cotton. The stitching was neat and the design balanced, so that in the dim light the work looked to Jenny a little like the watering of materials. She made some pleasant comment, and handed it back to the girl, who giggled again. "But I don't think you ought to keep on by this light," added Jenny.

The woman came in. "It won't hurt her. It keeps her quiet," she said. "It keeps you quiet, don't it, Minny?—Well, here's sixteen, if you care to give me twopence farthing apiece for them. Some of my reg'lar customers won't pay that, so I've got more than I can do with, for I won't sell them less."

"Quite right," said Jenny. "We're giving Mr. Tremble the same now. That makes three shillings exactly, doesn't it?"

"That's it, thank you, miss," the woman answered. The girl had begun to giggle and fidget abominably while this was going on. "She hates the dark. I'll just break up the fire. There, as soon as she sees the flame again, she's quiet. She has to have a candle burning every night of her life, and it comes expensive. It comes expensive, don't it, Minny?"

"Is she-?" Jenny began, startled.

"Yes, simple, poor child! She's my second. You'd never think she was twenty-two years old, but she is. She hasn't spoke now for days, but she's a good girl, working away at her sewing there. Why, she covers every mortal thing in the house with her patterns." She lifted her dress and showed a flannel petticoat stitched in the same mazy design. "Every stitch of her own clothing's done the same way."

Jenny was beginning to move out, and the woman followed her. "Was she like that from birth?" Jenny asked.

"Not she. She was born as fine a child as any, and grew up to thirteen, too. No, she was badly scared by a couple of dirty fellows on the heath; I won't say more as you're single, miss. She's never been right since, and she don't grow, either. No, she's one that eats and don't work for it."

- "Poor thing! I think I pity you the more."
- "Yes, there's no need to pity her. Your brother's a little that way too, isn't he, miss?"
- "Yes, a little." Jenny shrank from this home question, but a desire to know more led her on after a pause. "Do you think your daughter will ever cure?"
  - "No," the woman said decisively. But her

tone changed and she added, "Though the doctors at the County 'Sylum did say another shock might do it—but that's years ago."

"And is she always like this?"

"Oh, no, no, no! Far from it. Why, sometimes she'll chatter like a magpie all day long, and be as happy! There is days too, when she's just as she used to be; no one could tell that she wasn't all there. The worst is, when she gets violent."

"He never does that," Jenny said.

"Ah, you're lucky! I don't think he's at all bad, miss," she went on cheerfully. "I've met him often looking so well and bright that I wouldn't believe at first. You see if another shock won't put him right."

"It came on by degrees," Jenny said. She seemed to be talking to an expert in insanity, and sounding her for an opinion.

"Then you may be sure his wits'll come back by degrees, with good feeding and a healthy life in the open air. Keep him amused, that's it. I wonder you don't keep a few fowls yourselves, to give him some job reg'lar every day."

"It's a very good idea," cried Jenny, brightening up. "I'm so grateful to you for talking to me so," she added. "You understand how

sad we feel sometimes."

"It's worse for me than for you, miss. You'll marry away from it some day to a happy home of your own."

" No, no!"

"Well, there, I hope so, anyway. But it's a load round my neck to the end of my days."

Jenny sped away, crying out "Good-bye" in the gathering dusk. She had no lantern and the narrow paths on the heath became almost invisible at the first failing of light. Distressed and busy in mind, she hurried along, staggering when she left the path by a foot's-breadth, and once or twice nearly tumbling headlong with her basket of eggs. Their safety recalled her to a quieter pace, and she reached home restored in look, though still wretched in mind.

Arnold and Mrs. Mommery were at cribbage before the fire, and Jenny went straight through into the kitchen with her eggs. "Mortlake," she said, when she had shut the connecting door, "the people hereabouts think he is my brother."

"Yes, madam, I've noticed that."

"I think it is best. If you haven't told them otherwise, please don't."

"I have not, madam, and I will not. I have spoken of you to the Trembles as Miss Mommery."

Jenny took off her hat and coat. "Do you honestly think he can get better?"

"To-day for the first time I've thought so. If he can be like this for hours together, he can for good, I should say."

"There's a girl at the house where I got these who has been so for nine years."

"That girl! Why, madam, she is an imbecile, not to be compared with an educated gentleman who is out of his mind!"

Jenny almost laughed at his indignant protest. It certainly did seem ridiculous to compare that giggling undeveloped monster with her Arnold.

## CHAPTER III

T was no difficult matter to keep in health on the heath, for it was sandy and bracing there; and to none of the recluses there was it hard to keep happy. The two women were country born and bred, and Arnold was, even in his sane days, a hater of towns and civilisation. Mortlake had fast taken on a taste for solitude. There were books in plenty for use indoors, and a good deal of hard work to fill the dullest days. Most countryfolk in remote parts are used to a sort of Robinson-Crusoe existence, though the spread of advertisement lessens it every year; and Mrs. Mommery and Virginia had been particularly given to independence from lack of means. There was little work, indoors or out, they could not turn their hand to or direct. They had had to work hard at Menna's Camp, but then they had kept up certain appearances which Society demanded of them. At the cottage, Society did not exist, and they began to be careless of the look of the thing, except where Mortlake made a silent stand for convention. By degrees they shed

trappings which they had believed a part of themselves, and felt the freer for the loss. Mrs. Mommery gave up gloves at housework, and even out of doors, except when her hands were cold; and took to wearing a white apron openly, at meals even, whereas she had always shed it at the kitchen door before. Virginia rent her walking-skirt, and frankly darned it, instead of remaking or piecing it; the darn was on the left knee, very conspicuous for two reasons—first that the stuff was already prominent in this place from wear, and next that the wool was a bad match, blue-green on a grey-green.

Soon cottagers' style was the fashion of everything in the house. For environment forces certain ways upon men, if they care for their own comfort, and this household cared greatly for comfort, so that the line of least resistance was the natural one to follow. Even without the "niceties" of life, which are the fripperies, there was plenty of hard work about the place, particularly at the fortnightly or three-weekly wash, when the two women and Mortlake—and sometimes Arnold—slaved for two days at work they all disliked; the men fetching water, turning the mangle, lifting tubs and being responsible for the commissariat, while Mrs. Mommery and Virginia set to like laundry women.

Tuesday evening of such a hard-working bout was a delightful time: for the last clean thing had been aired and folded and put out of sight, the kitchen was tidied up and all traces of the ironing hidden away; Mortlake got the supper early, and they all went in good time to bed.

One Tuesday they had finished in very good It had been splendid drying weather. Mrs. Mommery and Jenny had ironed while Mortlake and Arnold had been out for a long walk, and the two women had called off work now that the men had returned to think about a tasty supper. Jenny saw them cheek by jowl over the cookery book at the kitchen table as she went out for a breath of air. It was her habit to go hunting Cakey, the cat, on Tuesday evenings; he, wise creature, left home as soon as the washing-fever set in, on Monday morning, and never came back until the floors were free from slop and the chairs from piles of clothes. Jenny's calling him was taken by the astute beast to be a covenant that the orgy was over and the house habitable for a decent cat, and he would come home to another fortnight or three weeks of domestic life. When Jenny set out on this occasion, he did not come leaping at once, for she was much earlier than usual.

It was fine and bright. She roved up and down the path calling and whistling, and presently strayed higher up the hill to the brow. In the distance she saw a person walking on a rarely used path running parallel to the one she was on. He was going away from her. When she called the cat from her high position, he paused and looked round, but she went down again. She called a few more times, and at last heard Cakey's answering mew. In the nearly black heather it was next to impossible to see his black body come leaping. Their meeting was very fond, as usual. He purred, mewed, rubbed round and round her, clawed her skirt, and finally jumped up into her arms, where she might more conveniently scratch his ears for him. Carrying him, she turned up the path again to have another look at the person she had seen. He was coming across the rough untouched heather to where she had been standing, stepping high and stumbling as his feet caught in the roots. Jenny waited for him, cuddling Cakey. The man came well up to her before speaking.

She saw that he was a big young man in gentleman's town clothing, and found that he had a gentleman's manners and voice.

# CHAPTER IV

N November of that year a lady of means died in one of the large modern houses at the edge of the heath, and her many relations were called to the funeral. Among the more distant and poorer relations was a young man whom the survivors had forgotten in the first crisis of their grief, partly because he was obscure and partly because he had had no communication with the dead woman for years. But she had remembered him in her will, and the solicitor, finding him absent, had sent for him in a great hurry on the day before the funeral.

The young man was a dentist's assistant, with no expectations in life beyond those his own skill and efforts promised him, and he came scurrying at this summons. The dead lady had helped his family with the education of three children, himself one of them, and had then stated clearly that she could and would do no more for them. There had been ill-feeling at this decision, which had lasted until the day of

his parents' death, and he had almost forgotten his indebtedness to this distant relation since. The telegram he had just received had said nothing about his being a legatee, and he thought mistily that he might have been sent for simply to be spoken to, but this seemed very unlikely. His journey from London had been made unbearable by the alternation of dreams and suspicions, and he was thankful to find he had a three-mile walk before him to clear his brain before meeting the funeral party. porter put him in the right road, bidding him ask again at the village, for the way was difficult. It was easy enough up to the village, for it never left the carriage-road. He asked further, and was told to go right through the village on to the heath, then to leave the high-road by the first track on the right by a white post, and then the fourth on the left would lead him direct to Eastern House. This was the shortest way, he was informed, and he couldn't miss it.

It sounded simple enough, and was simple enough for the first part. It was still quite light and would be for another hour or more, and he felt rested from his fatigue on this upland heath. He left the road by the white post, and presently began to look out for turnings on his left, but it was impossible for him to tell which

were meant for foot-tracks and which for roads or waterways. The path he followed was sometimes a clear cart-road, sometimes only a band of three vaguely shown parallel ruts or ridges, according as the hill rose or fell. In places it was bare and stony, in others overgrown with heather and gorse. Where recent fires had cleared the ground, it was even more confused, because other tracks, worn too deep for use and then discarded, were discovered, each with its three parallel lines for wheel and horse, so that the heath had the look of an important railway line. The townsman was so busied in trying to count his fourth to the left, that he soon slipped out of the original path and found himself following a single foot-track, well worn and better for walking than the cart-lane. He climbed a little slope and came down again into a hollow from which nothing could be seen, but he could hear someone calling. The dusk was growing apace and he was utterly lost. turned back up the slope and found himself in a sea of heather with no landmarks but a ridge of distant down. The calling still went on, and he thought he was walking towards it when it became suddenly clearer and sounded behind He turned about, and saw Virginia on the brow. He floundered towards her through

the heather, and she came up again to meet him.

If she thought him a gentleman, he was not so quick to discover her gentility. He saw in her a countrywoman, and believed all countrywomen to be of inferior class. This led him to be a little less formal than he would otherwise have been—but Virginia did not notice the distinction, as formalities are not used on the heath.

- "Is this the way to Eastern House?" he asked.
- "Oh, no! Eastern House is a mile and more from here. Are you going there now?"
  - "If you will kindly direct me."
- "It's rather complicated from here," she said, after a little pause, during which she had wondered whether she could describe the way. "The clearest would be to send you round by East Lane, but that is so long, and I expect that's the way you've come."
  - "I came through the village."
- "Yes, that is by the lane. Well, from here it's only twenty minutes' good walking—past the cottage here, take the third on the right, a track as big as this, and straight ahead down a long slope, where the path gets clearer, then at the bottom turn sharp to the left and follow

90

the valley until you see houses on the hill to your right. Then any track, pretty well, will lead you up to the ridge, and the road there is quite easy—a sandy road with trees—you can't miss your way after that."

The young man tried to repeat the directions, but forgot one of the first moves. She protested: "You will never find it! It's getting dark now, and the way is difficult to a stranger in daytime. You are a townsman too, I think."

"Yes, from London."

"That settles it," said Virginia decisively. "You would never do it. When it gets dark on the heath it does it thoroughly, and the paths are invisible. Besides, I think it will cloud over presently, and the night will be dark. It would be better if you would come in now with us and have tea, and afterwards one of us will see you over."

"That is very good of you. I shall be grateful if I can get a guide. These paths puzzle me."

"And tire you too. It's astonishing how tired strangers get of walking here." While they had stood talking, the short autumn aftersunset was over, and the heath was perfectly black to look at as they went down to the cottage.

The cottage inside was poor to the young

man's ideas. The door led straight into the sitting-room, which was barely furnished. Red twill curtains covered the windows, and the walls were whitewashed; a square of red ragcarpet was on the floor, surrounded by painted boards. The woodwork of the building was not only uncovered, but painted brown to match the floor, so that it was very conspicuous. The fireplace was half-grate, half-kitchener, with hobs, on which stood a kettle. A meal was half laid on a table without any cloth—an inelegant meal, in which the loaf and a large piece of butter on a plate were figuring as important features. On a narrow shelf above the fire were a good many books, and the young man would have liked to glance at their titles, but the light was poor and he could not draw too close. At each corner of the fire was a section of tree-trunk, sawed flat at one end and scooped a little at the other, obviously the most primitive form of stool or seat: on the wall facing the window was a shelf made simply by slinging a board by stout strings from two nails; on the whitewashed space between fire and window were a number of nails driven here and there, and from them hung scissors, hammer, a skein of bast, and a net full of twists of string. To a townsman's eyes all this spoke of poverty,

as did Virginia's appearance now that he saw her in the light. She went to the inner door and called her mother, who came out wiping her hands on her apron. As soon as she saw a guest, Mrs. Mommery put off her apron in a dignified manner, and came forward to greet him. "You did quite right," she said, "to come in. And we are very glad to have you. Put the kettle on the coals, Virginia, and we'll have a meal as soon as you are rested. You would never have found your way from directions—hardly a heathman could do it in the dark."

Virginia went off while Mrs. Mommery sat and nursed the cat, telling her guest how the animal had periods of leaving home. The cat purred, the fire glowed, the kettle hummed, voices in the next room laughed and chattered, dishes were clanked appetisingly. "One of our winter occupations," said Mrs. Mommery, "is taking wayfarers over to the houses in East Lane. Even in daytime and in summer it's difficult to direct anyone, and in winter it can't be done."

"Is Mayhurst the nearest station?" he asked her. "I just looked it out in a time-table."

"The nearest, yes, but you should have kept

to the road unless you were directed by someone to the short cut. It is a mile and more longer by road, but you save in the end." The kettle boiled, and she made tea and set the pot in the hearth to draw. "Tea's ready when you are," she called.

The door opened, and the young man was almost flabbergasted to see a respectable manservant enter, carrying the dishes. He thought at first that it might be the old lady's husband. but they sat to table while the man served. There was no cloth on the table, which was painted green; the dishes were thick and faded in pattern; the teapot was a fat brown cottage one. But the food was good—a dish of macaroni and another of eggs-and the flavour of elegance was given to it by Mortlake's austere presence. Mortlake was dressed in a black lounge suit, and looked, except for his collar, which was flannel, irreproachably the gentleman; the two ladies—for such now their guest felt them to be-were shabbily dressed. in clothes of the fashion of no time and no place; their hair was plainly dressed, without waves and puffs, and their hands were not white. The young man felt that he had trespassed on a secret, perhaps a scandal, and this notion was encouraged by the familiarity between the ladies and their servant, discomfiting to the young man, who was accustomed to the great gulf which is fixed between the middle-class and its servants.

After the meal, there was a general discussion as to who should take the visitor across the heath. Jenny said she intended doing so. Mortlake protested, saying that he could find the way perfectly well; but she laughed at him.

"I really believe that I could find it myself, if you'd very kindly lend me a bicycle lantern," the young man said.

There was general dissent at this. "No, indeed, sir. Excuse me, but I will take you."

"And both get lost out on the heath and die of exposure," Jenny cried.

Mrs. Mommery broke in. "I think both you and Mortlake might go. I shall be very well here, and you will be gone less than an hour. Yes, trot along, both of you, and we'll wash the things while you're away."

"Will you be all right, Mother?"

"Quite, my dear. Start away now, for there's rain to fall before morning, and it may begin any moment."

The three started out, and found the rain before they had gone over the hill. It was a boisterous walk, and the townsman could not

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get along fast; he thought the mile was neverending, as he clambered up hills, fell down them, staggered through narrow paths, slipped about ruts, and panted for breath. At last he saw lights, and was told that here was the gate to Eastern House. The rain was steady and cold now, and good-byes were short. He turned in at the gate and was at the door before he remembered that he had neither given them his name nor asked theirs. No one at Eastern House could tell him anything, but the general opinion was that his late hostesses must be artistic or literary people.

# CHAPTER V

RNOLD'S apparent recovery was soon over, and he relapsed into his old routine of idleness and hard writing. To all appearances he was no different from the state he had been in since they came to the cottage; his health was good, and he was occasionally very companionable. But as the weather grew cold, he showed a great dislike to going out. He had been sensitive to cold from childhood, and his extreme thinness perhaps made him shrink from sudden and great changes from heat. They insisted on his taking regular exercise, however chill the wind or damp the air; but the good effect of such activity was at an end as soon as he had settled indoors again.

Snow fell two days after Christmas, and melted the next day; and so on for above a week, so that they lived in an alternation of chill and damp. At last a storm set in; for twenty hours a fine snow drifted steadily; it was unbearably cold and dark. The fire con-

sumed fuel without giving heat; as soon as a door was opened the glow shrank or the flame fell down. No wild enthusiast would have asked for open windows in such weather; it seemed impossible to keep out the fresh air, for the cottage windows fitted only so-so, and when their chinks were stuffed the glass still let in as much cold. Early to bed and late to rise was the motto for such a time. At eight o'clock all were ready to go upstairs but Virginia, who made it her duty to set the room to rights for the morning, so that the first to come down was not disheartened by a litter.

She moved the cat's bed to the warmest corner, and sat on the floor before the fire while she made some warm gruel for him. Milk had given out, and the boy would not be able to get along the next day, perhaps for many days, so that she dared not open a tin of condensed milk for her pampered favourite. It was after nine when she had done and gone upstairs to her bedroom. Even then, when she was warmed through and snug, she could not sleep. Want of exercise made her fidgety, and she fell over precipices as soon as she was half asleep and had to start again. Dozing she was in this danger—waking she was irritated by the thousand bogey noises of the night, chairs creaking under

ghosts, sighs coming from nowhere, drips of invisible water. She endured these petty torments, but they succeeded in rousing her, and she was resigned to a waking night when some definite sound startled her.

The cottage was ramshackle. The door of her bedroom had some mysterious affinity with the third stair from the top; as soon as a foot trod on the stair, the door sucked out from the top corner and made a noise like a kiss. She always knew when anyone came or went in the house, for she could hear all that happened downstairs, and she had become a light sleeper, as those who watch the sick generally do.

The mysterious whispers of the night were dispersed at once when her door gave its answer to an unknown tread on the stair. She started up, but could hear nothing more for half a minute, when a cup was unhooked from the dresser. She heard the dipping of the cup into a pail of water, a sigh after a long drink, the clink of the cup on the stone sink—and she supposed that Mortlake had forgotten to take water upstairs. But while she sat waiting to catch the sound of his return, she heard his door open and another person hurry out and down without the caution the first had shown. Jenny jumped out of bed, snatched a box of

matches, and began to follow; a light came from the kitchen. Mortlake was a step before her; they stood side by side in the narrow doorway staring at Arnold, and he staring back at them. He had cut gashes in both wrists, and the blood had already soaked his blue pyjamas from knee to ankle. He looked terrified at his own state, trembling as he sat.

Mortlake seized his wrists and bound them with strips from the teacloths that hung on the line. At the first he saw that Arnold's wounds were not dangerous, but he could not find words to tell Jenny so. They worked in silence, except for an inarticulate noise from Jenny, until Arnold spoke.

"I am so glad you came! I was afraid, and wanted someone to help me."

"Poor old Noddy!" Jenny said, half weeping. "Poor old boy, then."

"I'd drunk all the water upstairs, and my tongue was burning dry, and I couldn't sleep, Jenny! It is rotten sleeping in the room there and you in the next room."

They soothed him as best they could. While Mortlake changed the blood-stained clothes and washed away the mess, Arnold sat shaking and half hysterical. The fire was still red, and he would have sat over it all night, but Mortlake persuaded him to go back to his bed.

"The wounds are not much," he told Jenny; but he's lost enough blood to weaken and scare him. He will sleep well now, as soon as he gets settled."

"You aren't nervous, Mortlake, are you?"
Jenny asked.

"No, no, madam. I'd no right to sleep so sound, but it was the cold, I think. There is no danger now."

It was only half-past twelve—seven hours and more till daylight. Jenny could not face the idea of sleep. She went up to her room for some warmer clothes, and came down at once. When the fire burnt up, she made some coffee, and got a book to read, but she sat brooding without a thought of the book before her. At three o'clock she felt miserably cold, and yet she would not go to bed. The fire was low again, and her feet nearly numb. She went into the sitting-room in the dark for a log, and coming back tripped on the matting on the kitchen floor, rattling her log against the wooden table-top. The noise sounded like a gun report: it roused Mortlake from his first doze in a chair, and he found Arnold leaning over him with a rope in his hand. There was no danger once he

was awake, and he knew it. He threw Arnold on to the floor by a blow in the neck, and pushed him under his bed to prevent his rising. Jenny came flying in to this fresh scene, this time her mother following. Arnold was violent and feeble in spasms; it was not safe to keep one's eye off him. As soon as Mortlake had him out from under the bed, he was rebounding like an athlete, then half fainting, needing support, then again unmanageably strong. Jenny overcame him by flinging a towel about his head and face, while Mortlake tied him with the sheets.

There was a candle burning as it had fallen over, and Mortlake lifted it and put it back in the stand. The clock had stood by it, and the glass of the clock-face was smoked black. He started to rub it clean with his sleeve, all the time trying to control his voice, for neither of the women could speak. At last he said, "We must have morphia in the house."

They looked at his face, swollen with a blow, at his stout dressing-gown torn across the breast, at the untidy broken-up room, then at each other. Jenny turned away. Mrs. Mommery said, "Yes, we should have had morphia."

She and Mortlake tidied up the room as best they might, for the floor was littered and every-

#### **HOUSE-ROOM**

thing was topsy-turvy. Virginia went to the bedside and spoke quietly to Arnold, who had given in to his bonds and was at rest. "I am going to send you away, Noddy, to strangers."

He said defiantly, "I shan't go."

"They wanted to send you before, but I kept you. But now you have tried to hurt yourself and poor Mortlake, and you must go to where they'll look after you better."

"Damn Mortlake! he is only a servant.

Untie my hands, my wrists are bad."

"No. I don't trust you now. To-morrow you will get untied."

She turned away and went to her own room. They heard her weeping wildly there for a long time. At last Mrs. Mommery went in to her.

"I love him so, Mother!" she said, in an emotional crisis. "I love him now, too much, too much. I must send him away."

"You are wise and brave, my dearest."

"I could not resist him always, I love him so," sobbed the girl. "And I've no right to pass on the taint to others. God knows I've suffered more than he has. I love him more than he me. I love him with all my soul, and body, and mind, and he only loves with his body."

Mrs. Mommery held her hand and kissed it,



but she dared not speak for fear of breaking down. As it was, she was crying silently, and with an old woman's restraint.

"Why was Mortlake sitting up?" she asked at length, as Virginia said no more.

Virginia told her what had happened in the first part of the night. "And we saved his life," she added mournfully, forgetting that Mortlake had said the wounds were slight. "God must mean him to live for some good, or He would not have waked us." Mrs. Mommery could not answer this unusual piety in Virginia. "Perhaps He will give him back to me some day."

### CHAPTER VI

HE next few days were a cruel trial to Virginia. The snow had drifted down into the small hollow where the cottage was built and stood there three feet high before the front door. At the back, which faced south, it was less deep, but still impassable. Mortlake dared not leave Arnold alone or with the women, and Virginia could scarcely manage to clear a track to the woodhouse for fuel. She was feeling ill, unable to get to her ordinary work, and the house had an air of being upset which would have distracted her in her normal state. She needed to get away and walk off the care that was upon her, so that she could take rest; but walking was out of the question. The necessity for having a clear path behind the cottage was Mrs. Mommery's good excuse for keeping the girl hard at work shovelling snow. Mortlake was restless to hear her at such a job, but the old lady told him privately that it was better so; that Virginia must be kept busy, the more she had to do with her hands the better relaxation it would be for her mind. It was a relief to her mother to sit in the house and listen to the girl's vigorous efforts outside. Her mind was wildly disturbed, and her body kept it company by extravagant performances in the snow; in ordinary circumstances she could not have done half what she then did, and she was astonished to find how slow the ordinary rate of time had become for that day.

Towards mid-day Arnold fell asleep soundly, and Mrs. Mommery insisted on Mortlake's getting some rest. She watched Arnold from the door of his room, while Mortlake slept in hers. Jenny prepared dinner for all, but only she and her mother were able to take it. Mortlake was anxious to have morphia at hand; Mrs. Mommery could hear him talking about it in his sleep. Virginia wanted a doctor to see Arnold's wounds. Mrs. Mommery herself was eager to have Arnold put under restraint away from the girl. None of these things was pessible, for no one could have gone ten yards before the house without two hours' hard digging.

Fortunately Arnold woke in his ordinary amiable mood. It was now dark, and more snow threatened. Mortlake had bathed and been out in the air to fetch more water and a pile of fuel; Mrs. Mommery had slept for an hour over the fire. Jenny was dog-tired; her back ached; her eyes were pricking. Her mother saw how weary she was and set about getting tea. But the girl started up and held her mother down in her chair.

"No, no! I will. Let me!" she cried. "And we'll have a good tea, for poor Mortlake has had no dinner."

She fried potatoes and made a hot scone. The kitchen smelt delicious and felt thoroughly warm. Arnold got out of bed, sniffing the frying ecstatically.

"I'm hungry, aren't you?" he said to Mortlake. "I'll just wash my face and hands and go down. Breakfast must be ready." He discovered the wounds on his wrists, and began to worry Mortlake for an explanation of them.

"You cut yourself," Mortlake said, when his pretence of not hearing would not last.

"There now! How did I do that? Well, you must dress me, and wash my face too, for I can't. Tell them we'll be down in a few minutes." He said no more about his wounds, but he was evidently puzzling over them. By the time he was dressed, Mortlake could see

from his face that he had remembered the past night, or some of it.

Tea was set on the kitchen table, to economise fuel in the sitting-room. The sight of the glowing grate, with a pan of hot vegetables on top and a brown scone peeping from the oven, delighted Arnold. He sank into his chair with a gleeful laugh. "It smells good, and no mistake," he said. "There's Cakey at the door; open, will you, Mortlake?" In came the cat, with lumps of snow on his fur. Arnold was delighted with the snow, which he had not seen. "I must look out!" he said. Mrs. Mommery shaded the lamp while he went to the door. But the strain of standing was too much for him; he swayed dizzily, and had to be carried to his chair. A little rest set him up again, and he took his tea fairly heartily.

The evening passed silently. Mortlake dozed on one side of the fire, Arnold on the other. Mrs. Mommery and Virginia played patience by the light of one candle.

The next day the snow was worse; a second fall had come steadily all night. Virginia had another bout of digging her way to the lodge, and had even to dig the sitting-room window free for the sake of light. Mrs. Mommery could recall no such snowfall for many years,

and her recollections of another such were cheerless—people had then been snowed in for three weeks. Virginia and she went to the store-lodge and eyed their possessions. In all things but flour they seemed to be pretty well stocked; they had cans of meat and of vegetables, a few of milk; plenty of rice, peas, and beans; a great heap of potatoes and carrots which they had bought a bargain. They had little fat of any kind.

"It will be a change of diet," Mrs. Mommery said, "and very monotonous, I'm afraid. I'd rather have onions, butter and flour than all these. But we shall do for a fortnight."

They felt the strain of this imprisonment in other ways. Their store of fuel was large, but it had not all been cut into suitable lengths, or packeted fit to hold, and they were using it so fast that Virginia had to spend a great deal of time in sawing and chopping it, so that her hand was bruised, and the saw was spoilt. Mrs. Mommery had all a country-woman's suspicion of snow-water, and would not touch it or allow it to be used in the kettle. What they had in the butt by the side of house was fresh, for it had been a wet season, but it was small and soon finished, and another difficulty was added to their many by the bother of having to bring all

their water round a clump of snowed-in gorse, across a stone heap.

The sun now blazed for eight hours a day and melted the surface of the snow; but at night this froze and cased everything in glass. Six days passed since the storm, and the cottagers were as badly off as on the first day.

The imprisonment told on Arnold at last. He had liked the rest as long as he was weak, and had been blissfully happy to sit before the kitchen fire or in the full heat of the sun in the open doorway. He had enjoyed the pampering Mrs. Mommery had given him, for she had had nothing better to do than to make dainties out of a few materials. When his strength was coming back, he began to tire of the house as soon as the others grew used to it; and he fell into another fit of bad temper, such as had gone before his violent attack. Mortlake was ill at ease, but Mrs. Mommery was secretly glad that he still showed signs of his worst outbreak; for Virginia must be kept to her decision to have him looked after away from herself, and her mother would use no arguments or persuasion to make her keep to that decision.

On the seventh day of their imprisonment, Arnold tried again and again to elude Mortlake's watching, and as he could not he became

#### 110 HOUSE-ROOM

difficult to deal with. Mortlake could not leave him for a moment. The strain was growing unbearable for all. Mrs. Mommery felt it least, or showed it least. She kept up a cheeriness when the others could do no better than sulk and wear the corners of their mouths turned down. But even her cheeriness was useless against Arnold's mood. He was intent on some mischief, and would not be put off it by her companionableness.

#### CHAPTER VII

SOFT thaw-wind set in in the afternoon and the roofs began to drip; small avalanches dropped off the bushes and made holes in the snow beneath. The wind came in at the kitchen door and window, and Mrs. Mommery had a fire lit in the front room, where she made Arnold follow her, while Mortlake watched from the connecting door.

Jenny made a desperate effort to find the path before the house. She was drenched to the knees in a few minutes and she could make very little progress. The snow was drifted into the bottom where the cottage stood; already the gorse on the brow had shaken free and was standing up black, but their hedge was still overladen. She could gain nothing by her work; she kept on doggedly, partly for the exercise and partly to lessen the distance between themselves and civilisation. In the few yards before the house the snow was still unthawed and the path free from mud where

she dug it. She had no sooner worked her way into the area swept by the wind than she found the path turn to slush under her feet, and she slipped about hopelessly. Further out yet, the path was unfindable. It was cut between gorse bushes, which had been broken down by the weight of the snow and formed an impassable barrier. Gorse is bad stuff to handle, and Jenny was a poor hand at heathman's work; she fetched heavy gloves and a sack apron, and, armed with a bill, started slashing away the smaller branches. She might have worked for ever at this job without freeing the path; but she set about it heartily, bearing scratches and rents without a murmur.

While she chopped, she thought she heard singing; as soon as she stopped she heard no more. A few minutes later she clearly caught a tune, whistled, coming over the hill-top. She would have plunged through a drift of any depth to meet the whistler, but she was cagedthere is no plunging through gorse. All she could do was to cry "Hallo there! Hallo!"

Her cry brought Mrs. Mommery and Arnold to the window. They were in time to see a red coat appear on the brow.

"Hallo there! Prisoners, aren't ye?" shouted the new-comer. "Soon be with ye now, and glad of it." He came, high-stepping down the hill, his legs sinking deeper at every step. Missing the path, he tangled into heather and vanished altogether, but he bobbed up at once laughing. "I'm glad to say it's soft, or I'd be black all over by now." He came as far as the barrier of furze, and was held back.

"Ah, this is how we welcome our visitors,"

said Jenny with a grin.

"Well, t'other was child's play to this," he said. "But we'll meet yet, miss, mind me."

"Shall I throw the bill?"

"No, I have my own. Fix bayonets, charge!" he cried, and letting down a sack from his back he attacked the bushes.

"How have you come?" Jenny asked. "You're a stranger here, aren't you?"

"Me! God help a stranger on the heath this weather! No, miss, I'm Edward Church, at your service. That's my mother over at the Green House, as they call it. You know her, I think."

"Yes, yes, I do."

"And I happened to be home on furlough just before the storm. You may suppose we often thought of you, buried as you must be in this dippen. Two days ago postman got to us

with your letters, but couldn't get no further. I've got them here."

"Oh, thank you."

- "And every day my mother was worrying how to get to you, thinking you'd be out of food, or what not. So yesterday I started out, but I give you my word I'd never had such a day before, and I pray I'll never have such another. Two mortal hours I was going out, and wasn't out of sight of my own home. So I turned tail, and went back quicker than I come out."
  - "How splendid of you to try!"
- "My mother it was, miss. She's a warm-hearted soul if ever there was one."
  - "She is indeed."
  - "So to-day I set out again, for thaw was in."
  - "How long have you been coming?"
- "I started as soon as I'd had my dinner. Somewhere about twelve o'clock, I should say."
- "And it grows dark now! Four hours to come a mile!"
- "Ah, the thaw makes headway on the flat where the wind can get, but it's these plaguey bottoms that you have to pass." He and Virginia were close together now, as they were both cutting into the bushes with a will, and

Mrs. Mommery, who had opened the door to call a greeting to the stranger, had gone in again. "My mother was the more worried, miss," he said in a quiet tone, "on account of your brother, and you few being alone with him—only one man, she told me. And my poor sister was at her worst while the storm lasted, and mother thought he might be in the same way."

Virginia nodded. "He was bad," she said, "and we've had a dreadful time. Much worse than ever before. He has to be watched day and night since then, and the man is quite worn out."

"I'll stay if I'm any use," Church said cheerfully. "I warned my mother so."

The worst of the barrier was down now, and he could step through, bringing his sack. Mrs. Mommery opened the door, and Virginia led him in. He was in a red uniform coat and soldier's cap, but the rest of him was civilian, for hands and legs were covered in gorsecutter's leathers. They all went in with him to the kitchen, for his sack was too wet for the sitting-room floor. He put off his leggings and gloves, and rubbed his head on his green handkerchief. Then he emptied his sack on to the table.

### 116 HOUSE-ROOM

"Letters come after eggs," he said. "Here's a short dozen, but better than none. Letters, which have got wet, I'm afraid. Set them on the fender, miss. Two pound of butter. And a piece of home-cured bacon, which is a present, please, from my mother. Then she put in this bag of meal, in case you was short. Better put it on a dish in the slow oven to-night, miss, in case it's damp, which indeed it must be. Couldn't help it. I couldn't bring milk, or I would have. Here's last week's local paper, and that's the lot."

"A regular Father Christmas!" cried Mrs. Mommery. "Oh, thank you, and thank your good mother. We can't say what we feel about it."

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### CHAPTER VIII

HETHER young Church came opportunely, or whether his coming was the cause of Arnold's disturbance, cannot be known. That evening. however, Arnold was taken with another He was quickly disabled and violent attack. tied to a chair—there was no gentler means of use. When he was bound, he still showed incredible strength in his efforts to stand up and set on Mortlake, against whom his violence was directed. He was quieted at last by the soldier, who sent Mortlake out of sight, forbade Virginia the room, and took command entirely of the invalid. They were all willing that he should take the lead, for they were disheartened and lacking initiative. Virginia was quite spiritless, not seeming to care what happened. Seeing her so dull, Mrs. Mommery herself brightened up by sheer force of will and set about cheering the girl. But it was thankless work; and at length the old lady gave it up. They were in the lowest spirits imaginable, when Church came out to announce that Arnold had gone to sleep. "You, sir, go sleep until I want you, and don't hang about in the draught on the stair-head. Take it easier, ladies, as he's doing now this while. It's a quiet time all round for the next hour or so."

Mortlake went down and gathered up the letters from the fender where they had dried. Mrs. Mommery had forgotten them, and Virginia was too preoccupied to care about them. There were but five: two from Miss Philippa Mommery, two from old Mr. Neace, and one from London containing a receipt. The old gentleman wrote first from Edinburgh to say he was coming south and would be at Mayhurst on a certain day, if they would write to him in London. His second letter was from London, to say that he had none from them and that he was therefore coming at once to the Archery Tavern at Mayhurst, whence he would drive over to them on his arrival, unless. a letter awaited him there. This second letter was dated three days before, so that Mr. Neace would now be waiting at Mayhurst, understanding their silence. Virginia read both letters to her mother, and then put them up without a word.

"He will be there now," Mrs. Mommery said, "and worrying about our being snowed up.

The postmen will have told them in the town. However, he will see us as soon as he can."

"Oh, yes," Virginia said, "he will stay there if he can stand the cold—which he ought to be able to do after Scotland—until we are thawed or dug out. It couldn't have happened better, for I shall get him to have him put away."

She looked wretchedly ill, and Mrs. Mommery would not go on with the subject. After a little, the old lady read a few bits of news from her sister-in-law's letter, and Virginia recovered enough to be able to make a comment here and there.

But the cold held, in spite of the thaw. The bottoms were choked with snow which no wind could reach, and the hills were perfectly clear before it was possible to get through the unmelting drifts. Three days more the cottage was a prison; then Virginia started out to Mayhurst.

"I may not be back this evening," she said.

"Oh, Jenny, do try!" Mrs. Mommery besought her.

"I shall try, yes, dear. But if I'm not here by an hour after sunset, don't get alarmed. I shall stay at the 'Archery.'"

Mrs. Mommery went as far as the path was cleared with her, and stood watching her over

the top. Church was in the upstairs window also looking on. Mrs. Mommery looked up to him and asked whether he thought it was safe.

"Safe enough," he said, "but not easy enough, I should say. She'll be worn through with struggling." He could watch Jenny farther than her mother could see. When she was out of sight for him, he went on, "But she'd have been worn out with worrying here, so I don't blame her."

Walking on the ridge was fairly easy, although the damp snow balled under the heel, and Virginia had to stop again and again to chop it away. She had started protected with gaiters and armed with a bill, so that she could carve her way, if need were; this formidable weapon she carried in a sack slung over her shoulder. She meant to bring some fresh provisions out with her from the village and had chosen to take the sack in preference to her net bag because it would hide the bill easier.

The track by which carts came ran round by Green House, a mile or more out of the way; her shortest road afoot ran nearly straight as the crow flies. Jenny knew it well, and had walked it in all lights and in nearly all weathers. In snow she had never gone along it, however, and she found it slow progress when she must

go down the hills, for the bottoms are sudden. From time to time she was forced to cut her way through the broken gorse, for it lies in great belts across the valleys, so that by leaving the path you cannot avoid it. She had had plenty of hard work and plenty of harmless tumbles, and was feeling as hot as midsummer when she came headlong over a tangle at the hill-top. She was drenched through by this topsy-turvy descent, but careless of such a trifle, and started to go down the rest of the slope, feeling for her purse as she did so. Her pocket was empty. This accident startled her. She turned about and clambered back to the place where she had gone sprawling; it was in a hopeless state, for her fall had shaken the snow down into the stems of the heather. But she must find the purse. She started a methodical search, and had sufficient command of herself to forbear from wild rummaging. In ten minutes the purse was found and she could start afresh. But now she was thoroughly chilled, and her glow was succeeded by a clammy cold all over her body. She began to shiver, and felt squeamish. The wind, so warm before, now seemed to pierce her damp clothing, and she had to start running to regain some of her lost heat. At once she felt exhausted and

was forced to go more soberly. In the midst of this unhappy mixture of chill and weariness, she suddenly felt a black depression fall upon her, and she forgot her physical misery in this new occupation. She now bore doggedly on, for the path showed clear, but she had made little progress before a new trial beset her. She began to go blind, it seemed, the sky above was visible, but not the ground below. She stood still, closing her eyes until the illusion should pass; she opened them to find it worse. Below a jagged line drawn midway from side to side across her scope of vision was blackness; to see any object she must direct her sight beneath it. This horrible discovery frightened her. She turned on her tracks, and began to march the way she had come, but she was continually losing the path and tangling in the heather. The blindness increased; she could now see only a small segment of heaven. Disheartened and afraid she dropped her sack, and fell into the soft, snow-capped heather.

She lay there in utter misery and fear, believing herself to be stricken to death. The silence on the heath added to her horror; as her sight failed she needed to keep in touch with the outer world by hearing, and could do so no better than by snapping twigs of heather

with her fingers as she lay among them. The wind no longer chilled her, for the brush was eighteen inches deep; she was well sheltered in it; but she could not get warmed through, for her clothes were drenched to the knee and damp elsewhere. She buried her feet in the heather and plucked some tufts to cover her legs with. At last her weariness overcame her and she fell into a doze. When she woke she could see perfectly, but her head was aching intolerably, with such pain as she had never known. If she sat up she felt sick and giddy; if she lay back the agony in her head increased with the blood pressure. She managed to get some relief by leaning her head on her knees. having tied her handkerchief tightly about her brow. She looked at her watch, but it had stopped. She looked at the sky; it was lightclouded all over, and it might have been two hours before or after noon. She had no idea of her position or bearings. From time to time she looked about, to see nothing but the snowcovered heath and the clouded sky, which presently darkened, and warned her she must make for home. Fortunately she could now make a guess at the south-west, and by that vague indication could set in the right direction for the dippen. In ordinary health she might

have gone at a good rate, for she followed the track she had cleared earlier in the day; but now she staggered and had to stop often to ease the pain in her head. She lost her path several times, and every time had to go back in her tracks to find it again. Night fell. She felt she must be near the cottage, but seemed never to arrive at it. Sheer exhaustion made her sink down where she was to rest a while. The repose gave her head some relief. The squeamishness passed away and she was aware of a keen desire for some hot tea. On again she went, and passing a willow-bush in the next valley was enheartened, for it was the only bush of that kind within miles, and it stood at ten minutes from the cottage. She started up the intervening slope at a smart pace, postponing her rest until she should be in the warm, but her ills were not thus to be treated, and she could go no farther afoot. With long pauses and small progress she crawled across the flat, expecting every moment to see the cottage light. There was none. There was no chimney glow, no chink of light. All before her was the indistinguishable glimmer of the snow under the clouded night-sky, with here and there a black bush looming. She shouted into the dark hollow. Her voice was weak; she knelt up and

tried to shout louder. No answer came out of the space before her. She had come thus far on her hands and knees, and just lay where she had stopped. For all she now cared she might be a mile from home, and she began to imagine that she had gone the wrong way all the time, passed some other willow, come on to some uninhabited part of the heath. There she would have lain all night in the growing cold if an answering voice had not come to her. Near at hand she heard the welcoming cry of a cat. "Oh, Cakey, Cakey!" she called, and was silent again. She heard the pattering feet on the path, another "trrr" lightly purred, and then felt the happy cat butt into her head as she lay. She caught him to her, while he purred and mewed in delight, rubbing the side of his iaw against her chin, and brushing his tail about her neck. Together on all fours they made for the hollow, he enjoying the fun, and running back to sport about her. There was still no light, but Jenny could now distinguish the cottage. She managed to walk down the hill, to pass the bushes and to come within six feet of the door. She shouted again. The cat leaped on to the step, purring. Jenny was at the end of her force, she gave another weak cry, and fell on the pathway, fainting.

## CHAPTER IX

IRGINIA had been gone less than an hour when a carriage appeared at the head of the hill. In it was old Mr. Neace, driven over from Mayhurst. The road he had come by, round the Green House, was still bad for driving, but he was impatient of waiting for news, and also anxious for the comfort of those in the cottage. He had tried before to come to them, but had got no farther than Green House, where, as young Church had already gone to the cottage, it would be no good leaving a message. He was uneasy when he heard that Church had not returned after several days, but there was nothing to do but to go back and shiver over the parlour fire at the Archery Tavern until the local people decided that the road was fit for horses across the heath.

Mrs. Mommery told him all they had to tell before he saw Arnold, who was sulking by the kitchen fire. Together they decided to remove him at once before Virginia's return. Arnold was asked if he wanted to see her before he left with his father, but he answered that she had been treating him badly, and he did not care whether he saw her or not. He brightened up a trifle at the thought of leaving the cottage with his father. They set out within two hours of the old man's arrival, Church in their company for the journey.

Mrs. Mommery then shut herself into the cottage to weep. She would have kept up this dismal exercise all day if the kitchen had been tidy; but the necessity of putting things to rights aroused her. She washed the dishes and set more water on the fire, while she folded the bedclothes on the men's beds. When it boiled, she washed through a few white things, mangled them straight away, and rigged cords across the hot kitchen to dry them. This brought her to darkness; she took her tea by candlelight, sitting in a grove of damp linen. By the time she had had her tea, her irons were hot, and though she was nearly worn out she ironed a few things that were nearly dry and turned the rest. This was done by seven o'clock. She no longer expected Virginia, as the sun was set hours since; and she believed the girl to be safe at the "Archery" or the room over the grocer's. Her last act was to call the cat, who

had gone roving as soon as she had begun her washing. She called at both doors, and tapped a plate with a knife to attract him, but he would come for no voice but Virginia's. Mrs. Mommery then fastened the doors and went upstairs to bed. In a few minutes she was asleep. Her room was at the back of the cottage. She woke later, thinking she had heard a cry, but when she was fully awake, she put the idea down to nightmare induced by the agitation of the past weeks. The night was very still. The wind had dropped, although the thaw held. There was nothing to hear but the occasional trickle of water from the melting roofs. She fell asleep again, and again was disturbed by a shout. This time she got up and opened the window to listen; after a few minutes' waiting in the chill, she heard no more and got back into bed. After this she lay half dozing for some time, preventing herself from sleeping outright, until the cat came crying under the window.

"Well, you deserve to stay out, Cakey," she said to herself. "You can sleep under the lodge." He persisted, running from front to back of the house with an unholy miauling, so that she had to light a candle and go down. The stairs opened into the parlour. For this

reason she unfastened the front door for the cat. She saw Jenny's head on the step, and closed the door hurriedly, fetched her light and peered out again.

Virginia had passed from her faint into a heavy sleep. Her mother's touch roused her. She rose on her elbows and blinked into the "I'm all right," she said promptly, light. "quite all right." She managed to crawl over the flagged step, and with Mrs. Mommery's help to get straight into the kitchen, which was still hot, with a good fire burning. Here she sank into a chair, overcome with the strain and with the steamy heat of the kitchen. Mrs. Mommery left her lying there while she filled a small pot with water and made her a hot drink. The fire was easily made to flame, and as it flickered, Jenny brightened up and leaned towards it. She was helpless. Her arms were swollen, her fingers dead. The front of her dress and coat, and her sleeves from the elbows down, were worn to holes. Mrs. Mommery cut off the outer clothes, and managed to get the girl out of the soaked underclothing. Jenny could feel nothing, and her limbs dropped like lead when they were released. Her feet were purple and swollen, so that they bore the mould of the boots still upon them. She was shaken with an ague from time to time. "Never got to Mayhurst," she said, when her mother fed her with the gruel.

"My poor dear! There now! I haven't got enough water for a bath, but you shall get straight into my bed, all warm, and sip the rest of this when you're there." The journey upstairs was a difficulty, but they persevered together, and at last she managed to tumble into the warm bed. Her mother got in by her side and hugged her, trying to pass her own heat into the frozen girl. From time to time she was shaken with the fierce agues that attacked Jenny. The bed rocked with them; the poor girl's teeth chattered, and it was impossible to hold her still. Mrs. Mommery found she was asleep long before these shivering fits had come to an end.

Day was well in before Mrs. Mommery herself woke, and she left Virginia sleeping soundly, while she dressed and made the fire. When the kettle boiled she made tea, and went up to see if Virginia was fit to have any. She decided that she was better undisturbed. Virginia's colour was good, and she was quietly asleep. But she had a bruise on her face, and scratches all over her neck. She was so soundly asleep that it was possible to lift the bedclothes and

examine her arms. There was another bruise on one shoulder, and from the elbows downwards the skin was grazed and discoloured, with dirt ingrained in the cuts. At mid-day she still slept, but no longer at ease, and flung about in the bed, muttering. Her mother woke her at once to free her from the nightmare. Virginia was inclined to be excited when she first realised where she was, but when Mrs. Mommery began to talk to her quietly she calmed down.

- "I want to see if you have any broken bones," her mother said.
- "Oh, Mother, such a bad day!" she exclaimed, recollecting her tale of mishaps. "No, no breaks, I'm sure, but everything else, I should say. How stiff I am!" She screamed as she sat up in bed. "Oh, there now! I feel as if I'd been beaten and bruised all over."
- "You are bruised here and there," said her mother. "But how much is bruise and how much dirt I've yet to find out. But you shall have some tea first, and then a bath, and then get back to bed and rest."
- "Yes, I'm afraid I must. I'm not fit to do anything else. What is the weather?"
  - "Rainy. All the snow will soon be gone."
  - "If only I'd waited! Well, better send

Church to Mayhurst as soon as you can, if Mortlake can manage alone."

"Yes, yes, my dear." Mrs. Mommery made her lie back in the warm bed, and hurried away to get her some tea, not caring to tell her what had happened. When the tray was ready to carry up, she set plenty of pots on the fire to get water for a bath. Her morning had been spent chiefly in carrying it in. Virginia was glad to see food; she ate hungrily, but little, and Mrs. Mommery was delighted to see her playing with Cakey, who had followed the tray up to the bedroom. He sat on the bed watching her feed, and putting his paw to her plate, slyly. Jenny caught it in her hand.

"Yes, shake, old gentleman!" she said

gaily. "You saved me alive last night."

"And acted like a Christian, with so much sense. Bless you, Cakey!" Mrs. Mommery cried.

"Why were you out, Cakey? Looking for missus? It wasn't washing day, you old guffin. Why was he out, Mother?" She was too tired to listen to any answer, for sitting up to eat had strained her aching back. "Now my head is bad again. I must rest."

She slept the clock round, gaining in sleep all she had lost in the journey. The next day she

# ON HECKLEDON HEATH

133

was up, and was told what had happened. Her first cry was against her mother for not letting her know. "You got me the water for that bath alone, Mother! How could you? Oh, how good you are to me!" After that, she sat silent, and Mrs. Mommery left her alone. She had been crying when her mother came back, but had passed the worst of her manifest grief.

### CHAPTER X

RS. MOMMERY wanted now to leave the heath and go home, but although the cottage could be left at a week's notice, Menna's Camp was let till Lady Day. She would, as second best, have gone to her sister-in-law's at Boiswood; but she would make no suggestion to Virginia, for fear of unsettling the girl. They went on for over a week alone together without the subject being mentioned. For the first few days Virginia was too wearied and stiff to make decisions, or even to think over her plans.

Another cold spell set in, frost following rain, and they were again cut off for a couple of days. Virginia spent this time in going through the boxes in the lodge, tidying, sorting and labelling. Finally, she made a bonfire in the garden. Mrs. Mommery never asked her of what, never even left the house to go to the fireside.

On the same evening Virginia said, "I must get work."

Mrs. Mommery was startled at this. She

had foreseen taking up the old life at Menna's together, but as soon as Virginia spoke she recognised the need the girl felt for settled employment. "What work will you get, Jenny?" she asked.

"What I can, I suppose. I wish I could get

away. You have Flolly, you know."

"Yes, I am all right, my dear. Yes, I wish

you could get away."

"I want to get right away—out of England, if I can. Or, if I can't, I should like to go back to Menna's. I don't know which. But I will start to-morrow."

"Start where?" her mother asked, alarmed.

"Nowhere," Jenny said, with a laugh. "Start trying, I mean."

They left the cottage at the end of the following week, travelling away without a farewell to their kind neighbours. Virginia could not bear to see them again. They went direct to Miss Mommery's little house at Boiswood. The year was quickening. It was high time to start on a journey.

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# BOOK III AT BOISWOOD

# CHAPTER I

BOISWOOD is the second town in the county. It gives place only to Bandiston Borough in point of size and population, and pretends to be its equal in all other things, if not its superior. There is, however, no more than lip-rivalry between the towns, and they are otherwise friendly disposed—in a pitying way—one towards another. Edmund Clewes compared them in his twenty-seventh year, and could not find a pin to choose between them, except in one particular which concerned him chiefly. While Bandiston Borough had a good service of dentists, Boiswood was badly off in that respect. He decided therefore for Boiswood.

He had five hundred and seventy pounds, the seventy his own savings, the rest the legacy he had received from his relation on Heckledon Heath. He had been in quest of it, you will remember, when he first came into this story, and had been found, top-hatted and worn out, wandering helplessly near the dippen. His

journey had been a profitable one, and he had gone back to his assistantship a capitalist in a small way. Seventy pounds had been a promising little nest-egg. Five hundred was riches realised. He was too careful to be exuberant with his top-hat, but he flung a cloth cap into the air, and made merry in his town lodgings by dancing decently round the table. Why he chose to leave London I cannot tell you, for he considered it the lord of dwelling-places, and, though he liked the country, he despised the provincial towns. Perhaps he foresaw an easier life in the stagnation of Boiswood; perhaps he wanted a change; perhaps some subconscious streak of sanity led him to leave the roar and stupidity of London.

He came to Boiswood as soon as he could be quit of his employment, and set up for himself over a jeweller's shop in the busy High Street. His one qualified rival was in an old Georgian house down the same street, a private house standing behind a wrought-iron railing, through which you could see a broad lawn and two Wellingtonias. This was a very high-class practice. Two fairly low-class ones were in the Corn Market and the High Street, exchanging for the lawn and trees glass-cases

full of grinning gold and porcelain jaws. Clewes's was somewhere between, on the high-class side, perhaps; for, although he could not boast of such retirement as the Georgian house, yet he was guiltless of the blatancy of his other confrères.

He had five rooms at the jeweller's, and chose the topmost for his bedroom, for it had a distant view over blue hills. The rooms were all well lighted except his work-room, which as he had to do the most of his fine work in it he chose to be lit through a tree and past the wing of the next house. Necessity made this inconvenience, for he must keep one decent room for patients, another for a surgery, and this slip-room, which was fitted with water, must be handy for both. He spent a good deal of time in the work-room, bent over a bench, and wishing the next house were out of the way; and he could see his neighbour, who put up seeds in packets, wishing the same of his quarters. Clewes took a boy newly from school to help him and learn the trade, and had a share in the jeweller's porter, who opened the door to patients. These persons, with the porter's wife, who cleaned his rooms and cooked his breakfast. were all the people he knew privately. This was a lonely life for a young man, especially one of

fairly sociable disposition. At times he felt decidedly gloomy about it, and used to talk to the men who had their meals at the same restaurant with him. For the most part, these fellows were commercial travellers, and either vulgar or dull to talk to, but occasionally he met with one whose conversation made his dinner pleasanter. One such individual was as regular at the restaurant as Edmund Clewes himself, but he was reserved, had a little table aside, and spoke to no one, eating with his nose in a book or paper. They might never have become acquainted, if this gentleman had not broken a tooth when the Georgian dentist was busy. He went with a raging jaw to Clewes, and they became friendly at once. He was Ridgecombe, a solicitor by profession, and also a man of means, who had lived a good many years in the town. He was ten years older than Clewes, but very young in his ways and appearance, which he put down to his having remained single in spite of many temptations. He was a keen naturalist, and invited Clewes to share his evening walks and his Sunday outings, in search of things to which Clewes had never given a thought before. The young man was glad enough to join him, however, and found himself learning a great deal from his well-informed

and observant friend. From this time, they became very friendly, and spent most of their leisure together. Ridgecombe knew a good many people in Boiswood, but he was exceedingly unsociable, and had no intimates in the place. He introduced Clewes to a few, since the young man seemed to have a liking for society, but it was little advantage to Edmund, for people were nervous of Ridgecombe, and not sure of the social standing of the dentist, so that he got little further in his progress. Ridgecombe's invitation, Clewes joined the Natural History Society, which took fortnightly walks in summer and gave fortnightly lectures in winter, with an occasional conversazione or dance to liven things up for the less earnest members, and as few of the young ladies who belonged were supernaturally scientific they welcomed the arrival of a goodlooking young man in their midst. But their mammas, though they could not prohibit their dancing with members of the respectable society, would not ask doubtful gentlemen to their houses, and after the mild excitements of the autumn season were over, or the spring General Meeting, which finished with a dance, was forgotten, Clewes was again alone. To make things worse for him, Ridgecombe went holiday-making to Italy. The dental practice was growing, and Clewes's nose was kept to the grindstone in a way he did not care for. He spent hours over his bench, speaking a stray word to the plaster-boy, and throwing a stray scowl at the seedsman over the way. In August this neighbour had had enough of bad light; he built in his garden a stout shed with plenty of windows and a skylight, and Clewes watched enviously as the parcelling bench, the packetrack, and the scales and measures were taken out to this new station under the light of heaven. Painters then went into the room opposite, and furbished it up to the nines. Day after day Clewes looked across to see what the seedsman would be up to next. His own life was so dull that he had to take an interest in the trifles concerning other people.

As it happened, on the days when his new vis-à-vis moved in, he was busy in his surgery, and had no time to be spying. When he had to settle down to workshop drudgery again, he saw a girl in cap and apron at the window opposite. She was turning the handle of some kind of machine; behind her on the new-washed wall was a row of pot-lids. The place was turned apparently into a scullery, and even this made Clewes interested, so desperate was

his dullness. In the afternoon the girl came back to the window and stood washing dishes. She looked up, and Clewes was astounded to recognise in her the girl who had found him on Heckledon Heath. She a servant! He could not make his memory tally with that discovery. During the next few days he saw her rarely; but she was always busy scouring, wiping, grinding something, and never, seemingly, had time to look up at him. Once when it rained in a sudden gust she ran to throw the window up, and saw him. Her astonishment was as great as his had been at the recognition. She stared, then nodded; he bowed. She went off puzzling as to his social status; for he was in shirt-sleeves and a very dirty apron, his bench was in a bad litter, and behind him on the blue wall, where the vulcaniser had a habit of exploding, was a series of disgusting smears and stains like dried blood.

As he went out to supper he peered in at the seedsman's private entry. Sure enough there was a plate inside, and on it the notice—

Boiswood Cooking School.

# CHAPTER II

IRGINIA had gone to Germany as governess in a small family. Everything in her life was new; she gained spiritual and mental strength from the extreme change. Her employer was an amiable woman, who kept her children at arm's-length while she spent all her devotion on her husband. Most of her life was passed in the kitchen, where Jenny could always find her, up to her elbows in some tasty dish. It was easy to win her affection through the one channel which interested her. undertook to teach her a few recipes for such English things as plum-cake, apple-pie, shortbread, and mint sauce. Roly-poly, with treacle, breadcrumbs and lemon, sealed their friendship. The lady saw in Virginia a proper woman, and in return for her tuition gave her a thorough education in German cooking. The children were neglected, but used to it; the husband was gorged, but also used to it. Jenny had been engaged for six months, she staved a little longer at the pressing request of her

employer; but the homesickness for Menna's came to her. She could no longer stay away.

It was August when she got home. Mrs. Mommery had been back some months in the place, and Virginia found it exactly as she had always known it. She gave herself a little holiday, roving about the familiar neighbourhood and living by the Stone. Her honest belief was that the Stone healed her, that it had been the object of worship for many centuries and many peoples; and believing so much, she could further believe that it was charged with some spiritual power on which she could draw. If her state of mind helped her, or if the Stone truly had this healing force, is not the matter; she grew well beside it; and the pain of her home-coming was lessened and at last done away by her secret communion with the spirit she found within the Stone. All her joys had been breathed into it; for that, might it not take her sorrows?

Mrs. Mommery had made the home-coming easier for her daughter. On her own return she had spent the first few days setting the place shipshape and receiving visitors. To these she told the bald truth, and asked them to start calling Virginia Miss Mommery again, without any reference to the past. She was a plain-

dealer, and therefore could count on meeting plain-dealers everywhere. Old-fashioned country people are direct, and if they lack polish they have a better courtesy which is genuine. They would have met a genteel shurring over with a great deal of mysterious whispering; the whole truth satisfied their curiosity and enlisted their friendliness. Jenny Mommery was not clouded in a mystery, but scarred by a misfortune.

When Virginia herself came home, shrinking inwardly from the sympathy and curiosity she was to meet, she found her neighbours exactly as she had left them, with none of their peculiarities hidden up in formality or washed away in sentimentality. She loved them for it, with the affection we give to dumb animals for their unchanging friendliness through thick and thin. The villagers were no less considerate. Before a month was up, life at Menna's was an easy wholesome life for Jenny.

The question of employment had been shelved for a little, while she got into touch with her home again. It was then solved easily, before Virginia had begun to cast about for work. Mrs. Mommery had gone to Boiswood for an hour's business with her lawyer; and as usual with country folk had made a day of it,

staring in shops, and making purchases for herself and others. In Hurst it is common for anyone who has to go into Boiswood for the day to tell everyone else about it for a little beforehand, and collect a host of errands, like an amateur carrier. This plan is an economy for all the stay-at-homes, and makes an interesting day for the one who goes. It is an approach to the past or future communal system, and is quoted here as one of the good points in that system, as practised in a picked community.

On this occasion Mrs. Mommery's errands led her (not uncommonly) to the registry office to ask for a cook for the doctor's wife. The woman in the desk was hopeless; she had cooks on one page, and ladies facing them on the other; but the cooks said the ladies were finicking and dishonourable, and the ladies said the cooks couldn't cook.

- "And to tell the truth, the most of them can't," the woman added.
- "They should learn," said Mrs. Mommery, out of patience. "Cooking is easy enough."
  - "Ah, but where's the question."

This remark sent Mrs. Mommery out to walk up and down the High Street thoughtfully. Why should not Virginia teach them? The girl had grit enough for anything. As soon as she was home she sat down and stared at Virginia, who was making tea in the dining-room.

- "Where is Flolly?" she asked.
- "Taken her embroidery to Mrs. Wheel's. She thought you would call in there before you came on. I knew you wouldn't."
- "Oh, bother Mrs. Wheel! I saw three servants for her. I am worn to a shadow." She lay back and kept up her staring at Virginia, who by this time was pouring tea. As she handed her mother a cup, she met her profound look and was surprised.
  - "Am I a beauty, that you look at me so?"
- "You are not a bad-looker, Jenny. But I was wondering whether yours was the face for the work I have found."
- "My face doesn't work! What is it? Tell me quickly."
  - "There is no cooking school at Boiswood."
- "That's a good idea," said Virginia. "Wait, I'll get a pencil."

Mrs. Mommery told her of the conversation which had given her the notion. Virginia soon left her calculations and was walking up and down the path before the Stone thinking out her plan.

She had dropped her sentry-go and was lying under a tree when her aunt Flolly came home.

As soon as the old lady had heard, she came running out to the girl.

"Jenny, my dear, your mother's just told me. I think it an excellent plan. Most suitable, and ladylike, too. Yes, laugh if you like. Now, where is it to be? You cook beautifully, I shall tell everyone so."

"You're a scatter-brain, Flolly," said Vir-

ginia, rolling over.

- "That's my youthfulness, you must overlook it. You know there's that wretched furniture of mine stored at Peebles's. You take your pick of that and I'll sell the rest. There is a whole kitchen outfit, scarcely used." She was going on when Virginia sat up and caught her by the knees.
- "It was just that was stopping me, Flolly—the expense of starting. I knew I should have to borrow money."
  - "Borrow! Virginia!"
  - "I know. I'd rather sell my skin first."
- "No, don't do that. It's not hairy enough. I will lend you twenty pounds to pay your first rent. Let my knees go, you look like a Mahommedan."
- "Flolly, you're a sportsman." They went in arm-in-arm, and called Mrs. Mommery to the discussion.

# **HOUSE-ROOM**

152

"Now is as good as any time," said Virginia at last. "We'll go in to-morrow."

A set of rooms was found above the seedsman's shop in High Street. A large kitchener was fitted in, a scullery and pantry stocked, all painted and washed white. Virginia made her own print dresses and large aprons; Flolly added the muslin caps "to look professional." All looked as new and good as possible.

Kindly interest really started the venture, and the first few pupils were personal friends of Virginia's or her aunt's. Virginia began to solicit orders for catering, and her capability in supplying dinners and garden-parties was the reason of her getting a steady number of pupils.

# CHAPTER III

HE capped-and-aproned girl was a perpetual interest to Clewes; he rarely missed her appearance at the window, but she had no idea he stared so-he was so gentlemanly about it. And, as there were intervals when he too was obliged to work hard, she could peek at her sweet will and wonder why he was there, and why he had been on Heckledon. He could see her cleaning pans and sometimes whisking eggs; she never caught sight of his finicking occupation, and naturally thought he was the jeweller's employee. When she went out of her rooms, she turned the other way and did not pass the jeweller's, so that she never saw the plate that announced his profession, though it was at two feet from her head at the entry.

One warm morning, when she was waiting for her pupils, she went down into the garden for a breath of air, and to chat with her landlord in his workshop, and took a turn about his garden with him, pretending to be enthusiastic about his petunias and begonias, which grew like cardboard flowers inside walls of ropetopped tiles. While they strolled together, and he picked her a bunch of white stocks for her window, a horrible scream arose.

"Oh, what was that?" Jenny cried.

"Another tooth gone, that's all," said the seedsman, greatly amused at her fright. "Don't you often hear them yell?"

"Never before. Where is it?"

"Same floor as you. If you look past the pear tree, you'll see the person getting out of the chair."

Jenny looked and saw a tearful young woman stepping back from the window. She disappeared and Clewes came to the window to lean out. Virginia looked away.

"No, I suppose you wouldn't," the seedsman went on. "Nine to ten they yell horrible, but as a rule you're not here till half-past."

Virginia went into the workshop to have a look round at the shipshape style of it, and the seedsman told her all he knew and more that he invented about her neighbour. Thus her curiosity was satisfied, but not Clewes's. His landlord never took him for strolls among the flower-borders and chatted of the people next door. The jeweller's garden, indeed, was the

reverse of the seedsman's, being no better than a rubbish-tip, where a few trees triumphed above a muddle of untidy boxes, spent bonfires, and dockens. No man in his senses would walk there, so that the young dentist had no excuse for staring up at his neighbour's chief window.

An unbearable heat came on in September, when the weather generally cools. A hot dry summer was followed by an autumn as hot and even drier, and Clewes flagged at his work. He had not been able to take a holiday in this first year of his practice, and had not thought it necessary, as he was practically in the country. But he was tied too much to his work, and made too little of his leisure now that Ridgecombe was away. He still kept up his attendance at the meetings of the Natural History Society, and had won a place in the esteem of the secretary and one or two enthusiasts by his regularity whatever the weather. He had no keen interest in their studies, but he would not miss the dullest possible walk in the worst possible weather, for even that little change and company was excitement for him.

An especially popular excursion was booked for the second week in October, for which some forty members were expected. Clewes read his inviting post card on the day before and searched the sky anxiously for fear of rain. Rain had fallen seldom in the past six weeks, but whenever it had come it had chosen a Saturday afternoon or a Sunday, his free times. But now the sky was clear, though the air was stuffy. Every time he went into the surgery during the Friday he glanced at the sky; every time he went into the work-room he looked at his card. He was intent on packing rubber into a prepared mould, which generally made his temper short; but he kept a tight hold of it by foreenjoying his outing. The society were to meet at the station for the 12.45, book to Kingham, walk through Kingham Woods to Bowlhead, through Maddows Farm (by the kindness of Mr. Charles Pemble) to Menna's Camp at Hurst, where tea would be served (through the kindness of Mrs. Mommery). Every member was to be provided with a basket or tin for the collection of fungus. The foray would be led by Mr. Nathaniel Noble, M.B., A.L.S., M.B.M.S., F.z.s., author of Inquiry into Fifty Cases of Alleged Fungoid Poisoning. Mr. J. T. Treevy, F.R.S., F.Z.S., LL.D., author of Bandishire, an Archæologist's Paradise, etc., would give a short address after tea on "Menna's Stone." and a discussion would follow. The members would return by the 7.20 from Hurst station.

Clewes knew this by heart pretty well, except the gentlemen's degrees, before the day was out. He was so engrossed by his work that he forgot to spy on his neighbour for a while. When he remembered and looked across, he saw an array of perforated trays covered with most deliciouslooking cakes and tarts. He had a sweet tooth: this sight fascinated him, and gave him quite an appetite for his tea. Later the young lady packed away these goodies into boxes under his ravenous stare; and in place filled the trays with larger cakes, plain, seed and plum. Last of all, she put a couple of irresistible monuments before him, one all brown with coffee icing and walnuts, one pink and white in a chaste design. with cherries stuck into the icing. He could stand no more. He sneaked out and bought half a pound of the best chocolate creams to occupy his craving stomach till supper-time.

He did not forget to stare at the window opposite the next morning, but she was never there on Saturdays, and he saw nothing more inviting than pot-lids.

The day was glorious, with a soft wind on the hills, though it was too hot for the stouter scientists in the valleys. Clewes marched with the first row of enthusiasts, whose enthusiasm soon left them behind, grubbing for toadstools

in all sorts of odd corners, while the least scientific got far ahead. The whole party straggled out into a tail nearly a mile long; as often as the quick walkers learnt the way from their nominal leader off they started with an unscientific briskness, till they were brought to a stand by not knowing where their next route lay. At last they were put in the right way for Menna's Camp by the leader, who was sick of them.

"It's only about three-quarters of a mile now," said he when they went off. "And now we can be at peace till tea-time." Clewes was at his elbow, drinking in long draughts of mycological knowledge, and writing the name of every specimen found in the society's notebook. His neat handwriting earned him this office, for otherwise he was totally unfitted for it; he had to ask every minute how the words were spelt, and sometimes when the sound and the look did not tally he was rash enough to trim the shape. He had gained glory in the leader's eyes by finding a rare green toadstoolthey were all rare to him—and he was soon respected by the others by being able to rattle off its name to every inquirer.

It was a bad day for fungus. There had been too little moisture to supply a good crop, and one man, who declared they were the most nitrogenous food you could have, was trying to beg enough for his supper from more particular feeders; he said he had never had a wretcheder autumn in his life. Clewes gave him all his collection, eatable or otherwise. It was a good day for a jaunt, whatever it might be for a foodhunter.

- "Thank you, thank you," said the collector.
  "I shall have some supper to-night."
  - "I shall enjoy my tea," Clewes told him.
- "Well, we shall get a spanking good tea at the Mommerys'," said the secretary, "and we may as well get along now to it, before the others eat it all. We take to the road here and shan't find anything more."

Clewes was in the last batch of arrivals at the Camp. He was actually the last man in, for with the leader and the secretary he stayed to deposit the baskets in a convenient corner of the front garden. They then lingered over a cooling wash and Clewes waited while his companions wrangled over some crackjaw name of a fungus. When at last they went down to the diningroom they found tea well forward. Five ladies were pouring tea at side-tables, and two servants were waiting. All the seats at two large tables were full, but place was kept by Mrs.

Mommery at a smaller one for persons of honour, and Clewes sat down with them.

She recognised him at once—as quickly, in fact, as he recognised the coffee-and-walnut cake; and, as she reminded Clewes of their last meeting, and he recalled her face, he blushed with the magnitude of his discovery. While he fell to on the spanking good tea, he looked about for Virginia, but she was pouring tea at a sideboard behind him, and all he could see to fit his recollections was a section of panelled wall, on which hung scissors, hammer, a skein of bast, and a bill-hook.

Some of the members finished their tea almost as soon as he had sat down, and strolled out into the garden. As the room grew empty, Virginia left her duty and came to join the talk at the little table. She shook hands with Clewes, and said "Do you recognise this?" tapping the cake with a knife. When they had done, she took him out to the Stone, and went on with their slight friendship where it had been dropped at Heckledon. She led him past the group about the Stone, where the lecturer had taken up his stand, and round into the kitchen garden which was quiet. Cakey came running to her, and she recalled him to Clewes.

He loved cats. He lifted Cakey and pulled his

ear in the right way to win his love. "But you are missing the lecture," Virginia said.

"Oh, I know a lot too much already," he cried. "If I may, I'd far rather miss it."

She told him her theory of the Stone, and they strolled back to join the party, but found the Stone deserted, for the older members of the band had not cared to stand about on the grass, and the lecture was being finished in the house. At last they went back to the diningroom, to find that Miss Philippa was taking the party over the house, giving a really guide-like historical account of it.

Mrs. Mommery was sitting alone in the dining-room, resting before a fire which had been newly kindled. "Do sit down and rest," she said to her guest. "You can see the house some other time." The room had been restored to its daily order, and it struck Clewes, in its bareness, as being poor, just as the cottage and its fittings had struck him. Mrs. Mommery and her sister, however, were not shabby now. Both of them wore silks and laces, and Virginia had an air of being daintier than any other lady in the party. They were all tired and stale, she was fresh and in light raiment; but he did not know the reason—he was content with the result.

The enthusiastic party came down with Miss Philippa and conversation became general, but Clewes felt as one of the family, sharing the fireside with Mrs. Mommery, with the cat purring on his knee.

This distinction was pleasant while it lasted, and to his astonishment it lasted on the way home. He had come out, as usual, a disregarded member, respected by the club officials only, and tolerated by the rest, who suspected his social status. He went back a courted individual, the friend of the Mommerys. He blushed in the train when he reflected that he had thought them decent country people and Jenny a servant. If their acquaintanceship could move him a peg up socially, they were better than he understood.

#### CHAPTER IV

HE following week Clewes had another jaunt awaiting him. For some time the local paper had been announcing that the great autumn Market and Fair of Bandiston Borough would take place during the third week in October, lasting four days. There would be a Cattle Show (with prizes), a Dairy Produce Show (with prizes), a special Chrysanthemum Show (with prizes), and on the Saturday a concert would be given in the Town Hall, at which two famous singers were booked to appear.

Clewes's need for distraction was so great that he would have travelled the thirty miles to Bandiston merely for the Shows, but the chance of hearing Canneroni and Luise Hallmann was not to be missed. He marked off the whole day in his appointment book and looked out a convenient train.

He had never been to Bandiston Borough before, and managed to pass two hours of the morning walking about staring. The day was fine, with a thin sunshine between-whiles, not mild enough to make a man loiter, yet not cold enough to drive him within doors. Clewes went in and out of the Cattle Show quickly; he thought the whole business cruel, and could not stay to admire the fatted beasts. In the Produce Show he was happier, and was much astonished at the roses and lilies made of butter. There was a pleasant smell, too, in this hall, and the attendants were more agreeable than the strawy and gaitered men in the Cattle Show.

By the time he had admired everything and flirted with the rosiest of the milkmaids, he was hungry, and went out to find a decent meal. Fortunately he was very early, and could find a seat, for the town was overflowing with sightseers, and the accommodation was only normal. He might not linger over his dinner; others came crowding in and every seat was needed. He went to the Chrysanthemum Show, which was near at hand, and spent half an hour strolling between the booths enjoying both the beauty of the place and its quiet, for the bulk of visitors were away for their dinner, and only a wise dozen beside himself were in the hall. The concert was booked to begin at half-past two, and as he had not bought a ticket he went to the room at a quarter to. The doorkeeper

laughed in his face—the place had been full for a half-hour or more, but if the gentleman liked to pay a guinea... Clewes refused. He considered no two voices worth that price. He looked up a train home as he walked away. There was none for an hour, so he took a turn about the town again, looking into shopwindows and at his fellow-sightseers. He had passed half the hour in this easy way and was waiting about near the station for the latter half, when he was suddenly called by name. He spun on his heel at Virginia's familiar voice, delighted to meet a person he knew in this wilderness of strangers.

"You looked so absorbed," she said at once, "I hardly dared to speak."

"It's this thing," he answered, pointing in a window, where the words "Teeth Carefully Extracted" were emblazoned in teeth on black velvet. "Just look—in the first T alone he has got two smashed molars, and there's hardly a letter without some of his rotten work to give him away."

Virginia shook her head. "Well, I should never have known. Yes, it is funny, but it takes us in, you see. I often used to wonder what you did with the teeth."

"Yes, we make patterns with them. We

learn it at Hospital. Are you going to hear Canneroni and the lady?"

"It would be useless trying, the hall is full."

"I know, I tried half an hour ago. Have you seen the Chrysanthemums?"

"No, nor want to. All I want is to get away from the noise. There's no train till five to four, so I'm going to walk part of the way."

"There is the two-fifty-two. I was waiting to take that."

"It doesn't stop at Hurst."

"Well, if you are walking, may I come too?"

"Gladly," said Virginia. She led the way down a side lane. "This is the shortest way out to the high-road. It's a little dingy, but we shall escape the racket and dust."

"Oh, you know the town, I suppose."

"Yes, I was at school here." They said no more as they went through the narrow lanes, but as soon as they were in the quieter streets of the suburb, they chatted of the day's excitements. Virginia said, "I thought of walking to Lowfield and taking the train there, about six miles. It gets in at four-eighteen then."

"I'm delighted at the idea. I was sick of hanging about in the town, and I never thought of starting out to walk." "No, you are a townsman yet, in spite of living among us," Virginia said. "Have you seen anything of the neighbourhood?"

"Very little, except in Natural History."

"You haven't seen Quill Castle, then?"

"No, I never heard of it."

"Well, if you'd care to see it, we ought to turn off the main road at the next turn but one. and go round a long way to Framey station. It's only a ruin now, but the view is fine, and we should get off the road for a long way...." He agreed that it would be pleasant to go that way. Virginia went on. "Quill is interesting. It was used as a convenient place for putting and forgetting persons whom it wasn't safe to put on trial, and they used to eat their hearts out and die. The place is full of ghosts now, and not much else." She spoke sadly, and Clewes noticed that she was not her usual bright self. He walked in silence by her side, until they turned into a green park where the Castle was built on an artificial hill or mound. There was little left beside the four walls and a couple of towers with trees growing out of them; but it was still possible to trace on the stones of the upper chambers of the towers the initials of the men who are said to have lived and died there.

The view from the towers is wide. Virginia pointed out the Downs that ended at her own home. "In clear weather you can see Menna's Camp distinctly, and if you have a glass you can see the Stone."

They went on through the park at a good pace, for the air was growing chill and they had dawdled in the Castle. Framey village was reached three-quarters of an hour before the train was due, and Clewes refused to go on to the next village. He declared for tea, and Virginia was glad enough to have done with her walking, for her whole day had been tiring. They sat over the fire in the parlour of the De Crispin Arms, and Clewes told Virginia why he had gone to Bandiston Borough.

- "I get tired of my own company. The summer wasn't so bad, because I could get out more."
- "You're very musical, aren't you?" asked Virginia.
  - "Not I. I'm sorry, I wish I were."
  - "Mrs. Lewis Jones told me you were."

He cried out at this. "Why, I have never spoken to the woman in my life! I have met Jones. He called on me when I came here, and I called on him, and he has given gas twice at my place. But that's all."

"I beg your pardon. She told me you were at all the concerts, and that's how she got the idea, I suppose."

"Well, let her believe it. It's quite respect-

able, if it doesn't go too far."

"Have you been asked to join the Shakespeare Society?"

"They sent me papers. They said it was very

select, and cost a shilling to join."

"That is what keeps it select," Virginia said.
"I belong to that, and I shall probably be going this winter, as I'm working in Boiswood."

" I shall join, then, and get the reputation of

being very Shakespearean."

"Please don't," cried Virginia, "not in Boiswood. One of my aunt's stock stories is about the Society. They got an actor down who read some of the plays with it all left in, and the Archdeacon's wife and about six other people got up and went out."

"Did your aunt?"

"Dear, no! She is very firm about it. She says it was just like Americans, and that no lady would have done so."

"And which play was it?"

"They always ask that, but she's never told."

"Well, at any rate, I shall pay my shilling at once. Is there time for another cup? And

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# HOUSE-ROOM

are there any more stories about the Shakespeareans?"

"None fit to tell."

170

They went down to the station in short time for the train, and after the scramble to get into the train, Clewes remarked that Virginia was in much better spirits. He put it down to his own company, and he was right. She had certainly cheered him up wonderfully, and he felt as happy that evening as he had done since he came out to the savage country.

#### CHAPTER V

HEN Virginia got home she found her mother busy in the kitchen alone.

"I couldn't see him," she said at once. "Dr. Maguire says he is better left undisturbed."

"Well, well," said her mother, "it is better so. But you've not had any tea."

"Yes, I have. At Framey. I walked part of the way home. Bandiston is horribly gay this afternoon, and I couldn't wait there for the train."

"Well, I've nearly done now. Jessie is due back in a minute or two. So Bandiston's very lively?"

"A perfect crush; the place is unbearable." Virginia had put off her coat and gloves, and was helping her mother. "He still sees his father," she went on.

"My dear, don't let it worry you so. You get no good of it."

"No, but it takes little to worry me about that."

"There's always something to worry about if you've a mind to," said Mrs. Mommery in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Yes, there is," Virginia said. She seemed to be preparing to say more, but the moment passed in silence. Jessie set her hand to the latch of the door, and Virginia caught up her coat and went into the house. Mrs. Mommery followed her soon, and found her lying indolently back before the fire while Flolly questioned her about the Shows in Bandiston. The old lady was trying to cheer her niece up, and succeeded in rousing her to conversation. Virginia began to talk about her walk home. Flolly was not interested; she had egged Jenny on out of kindliness, and between-whiles followed a printed crochet-pattern from a book on her knee. Mrs. Mommery had sat down at a side table with an account-book, and was apparently busied with figures; but it was she and not her sister-in-law who caught Jenny slipping in her story of the walk through The girl began in the first person singular, and ended in it, but at one moment the first person plural cropped up. Jenny and Flolly were both unconscious; Mrs. Mommery was disturbed. She sat so long over her ciphering that Jenny came to her rescue.

Mrs. Mommery had found that worry was catching. Virginia's expressed worry was not visible, but she had spoken of it, and her mother had caught it at the sound of the unexpected "we." If the other party to that pronoun had been Miss Clarkie or any of her old schoolfellows, the girl would have mentioned it. Her mother began to run over in her mind a list of the attractive men in the town. Unfortunately she knew few persons there, and little of the composition of the families of the girls whom Jenny was acquainted with. Flolly knew them better, for she had once lived in Bandiston Borough for eighteen months, but it would not do to ask her.

The evening passed without another slip on Virginia's part. She had relapsed into the gloom she had suffered from earlier, and scarcely spoke unless she was asked a question. Her mother and aunt did what they could in an unobtrusive way to distract her, but she was suffering mentally far deeper than they could reach, and she did not offer confidence. The two old ladies went first to bed, and Mrs. Mommery listened for hours for Virginia to come upstairs. At last she lit her candle, and seeing it was after midnight, she feared the girl had fallen asleep. They were early people, and the last light was

often out by half-past nine. She slipped on her gown and went down. Virginia met her at the dining-room door, startled. "Oh, what is it?"

"What are you doing up? Had you been

asleep?" her mother asked in return.

"No. I forgot how late it was getting. It must be near midnight."

"Past, my dear. You will get no beauty

sleep to-night."

Virginia went back to see that the fire was safe, and to put out the lamp. "Now I'm ready," she said.

Her mother's candle flickered, and the stairhead was nearly dark when they reached Virginia's door. She went in to bring out her candle, and lit it at the unsteady flame of her mother's. The want of light was propitious for confidences, and Virginia said, "I shall not go again."

"No, my dear," her mother answered.

"Not even if he sent, now. But that will never be. I have done my part, I think."

"Indeed you have, my Jenny."

"The marriage service would say I haven't, but I mean from a human point of view I couldn't be expected to do more."

She kissed her mother and went into her room.

# CHAPTER VI

OW that Clewes was acquainted with his neighbour he had not the face to be staring at her window all day; but he glanced over between-whiles, and nearly every day they exchanged a nod. She had no false modesty about looking over at him, and never wore a guilty look when he caught her at it. Rarely he saw one or other of the pupils at the window, and found himself working under the curious gaze of a strange young lady; but generally Virginia kept her little side room for her private use, and allowed no one in there unnecessarily. One afternoon, when the light was fading early—for the year was well on to the shortest day—Clewes was busy making the most of what daylight was left after his neighbour, who had none of the western light, had lit the gas in the room opposite. He glanced up to see a red coat before him: a soldier was sitting facing the window, eating heartily. Clewes knew Miss Mommery's cooking to be good, and could understand the man's enjoyment. The stranger was unconscious that he was being watched, and gorged himself delightedly, taking first a fork to his mouth and then a knife, and varying this ambidextrous performance by lifting a cup with both hands. Clewes had never seen a man enjoy himself so well; it would have made any normal person hungry to watch so hearty an eater set to his work. He kept up a steady meal longer than Clewes could see, for it was now too dark in the work-room to manage without a light, and once that was lit the soldier was watcher as well.

The next morning Clewes's first patient was this same soldier, and although it was before ten o'clock the man had been drinking. He could not be called drunk, but neither could he be said to be sober. He walked straight and spoke distinctly, but he spoke too much and too cheerfully for that hour of the morning.

"How much?" he asked, when Clewes had looked at the aching tooth.

Clewes suggested an injection.

"Not for me. The shortest way's the best. How much a plain tug at it?"

"A shilling."

"Ha, ha! That saves my lady-miss eighteenpence. I'm glad of it, I am." He took out a shilling and set it on his knee. "Now take the tooth first and the shilling after." Clewes laughed and turned to get his forceps. "I was 'commended to you by a lady neighbour of yours, sir."

" Miss Mommery?"

"Ah, you saw me taking my tea there yesterday. Well, it was her sugared cake started my old enemy, and she straightway give me the half-crown to come to you. But no. I couldn't come without courage, for what's a soldier without his courage? I slept on it, for my brave hour's the morning."

"Open now. Head a bit lower," said Clewes. The soldier roared, the tooth went flying, the shilling after it; bang-bang came down the patient's feet after a prolonged aerial dance.

"That's a wonderful cure for a long night's drunk, if ever a man was weak enough," he said after a moment, rubbing the outside of his cheek. "Now to find the shilling."

"There it is in the corner. Let it lie," said Clewes. "Sit still a minute or two. It wasn't so bad after all."

"Bad enough. And I do believe that if I hadn't had a drop to courage me on like, I couldn't have faced it. 'Be a man, Church,' she said, and reminded me how I'd stood by

when there was real danger. A sad thing that about her brother, sir."

"Really," said Clewes, not daring to put too much interest into his face and voice, yet wishing to hear all he could about Virginia.

"Ah, I was with them when it happened, almost, though he'd been simple for a long time. And then come a violent attack, and he tried to make away with his keeper and himself. It was best for all parties that she let him be taken away, and they could leave that lonely heath."

"Heckledon Heath?"

"My home, so I know it. Well, good day and obliged to you, sir." He was as sudden in his going as he had been long making up his mind about it, and Clewes, stepping into his waiting-room to see if there were any more patients, had the curiosity to look from the window and spy on him. He saw the red coat making straight for the "Three Blackbirds"; then turning back; then starting off again; and so four times altogether, until people in the street began to stare and smile. At last strength of mind conquered; the soldier came across to the seedsman's door, and Clewes lost sight of him.

That day was a slack one with the dentist, and he thought of little but of Virginia and the cottage on Heckledon Heath. He was the more interested as he saw nothing whatever of his neighbour. This was just chance: it had happened before, but not often. The next morning and afternoon passed without a sight of her, but in the evening he saw her as he was coming away from his supper. It was raining hard and the street was almost deserted. She was walking on the other side of the road towards her rooms, and he crossed to her. She told him she had been cooking for a dinner-party in someone else's house. It was new work, an experiment, and she would not do it again. She was dog-tired, and would get no credit—or too little—for her efforts.

"And now you are going back to Hurst?"
"No. That's the crowning horror. Mrs.
Cannock lends me a beastly chair-bed. I shall
find it in my kitchen when I go in. It was either
that or the Eversley Imperial, where they

charge you London prices for the stalest country accommodation. Well, here I am. Good night."

"Good night," said Clewes, laughing at her misery. "You can grumble champion."

This cheered her up unexpectedly, and she went in laughing. He played solitaire in his sitting-room for an hour, wishing that he could ask his neighbour in for a cup of tea and a chat.

### CHAPTER VII

S if to make up for the long dry spells in summer, the rain, when it started, fell in earnest. Not by hours or by days was it reckoned, but by weeks. November's rainfall was a record. Clewes discovered a corner of the weekly paper which gave the weekly figures for Boiswood, Bandiston Borough, and Hurst, the last being "kindly supplied by Miss Virginia Mommery, Menna's Camp." He was indignant to find the rainfall for Hurst was considerably less than for the town, and reproached Virginia for this when he met her at the station bookstall.

"It's really not my doing," she said, surprised at the intimate tone he now took. "But if it were, I should still have it so." She turned away, wondering whether she liked his friendliness, and turned back again after looking at the weekly papers, decided that she did like it. He had not noticed her pause, for he himself had been wondering at the same moment whether there was any taint of insanity in the sister as in

the brother. He noticed her often looking preoccupied and morose, and was a little nervous of this mood in her. But it suddenly struck him, when she was judging him, that she was naturally depressed at her brother's condition. Her train came in before they had made many more remarks, but he had cheered her up again, and she went away smiling. He liked her best so, and carried away a very pleasant memory of her gay face with him.

His whole stay at Boiswood had been dull and lonely for a man who had no private hobbies; but he had never realised it so much as during these autumn months. This was due partly to his imprisonment by the steady rain, and partly because he had now some friends and could get no forwarder with them. Mrs. Mommery had said something about his seeing over the house "some other time"; but no invitation had been given, and none was given for the two months that followed. It was not until the first week in December that he was asked, and then, though he did not know it, only to be of use.

Distant connections of Mrs. Mommery's, who had business abroad, asked her to look after their two unmarried daughters for a few weeks. She had met these girls only when they were small children, and had done no more since than

exchange cards at Christmas with their parents. She was poor and not worth cultivating; they were well-to-do suburban people. But they remembered her oftener than she them, for she figured in their conversations when it was necessary to impress persons better connected. She was glad enough to take charge of the girls, and to receive their father's liberal payment.

The two visitors were precocious young ladies, born and bred in good circumstances on the edge of genteel London. All three women at Menna's Camp had some misgivings as to how they should keep these townsfolk amused, especially during winter, and began to look up all their young acquaintances. Thus Clewes came to be asked to spend a Sunday at Menna's.

The weather was still bad, but the day was full of pleasure to the young man. To be translated for a while from his grim loneliness at Boiswood to the company of pretty flirtatious girls, and of Virginia, was pure delight. Virginia herself was changed from her usual rather gloomy serenity to a mood in keeping with the girls', and Mrs. Mommery and her sister-in-law were indulgent and of that cast of face and mind which makes for happiness. The party were kept indoors by unceasing downpour, but the house was large. One young miss

played, one sang; both were pretty and full of charm. It was Sunday—they might not play games, but they sat up to the fire and cracked ghost-stories till Clewes's train was due.

In the week he made bold to invite the party to Boiswood theatre with him. There was a melodrama company down; it would be exquisitely funny to see. Virginia answered for her cousins and herself—they would be delighted. A few days later he was bidden to tea at his neighbour's, and there the elder miss showed him how to make toffee, and the younger miss burnt her finger, which he tied up while she cried.

By now they were intimate. Both girls were in love with him, and he was pretty well in love with both. They were at this stage on Ridge-combe's return, and he, amused to find how far his young friend had progressed, sat by to watch. He decided that Clewes's safety lay in numbers: to be so attentive to and admiring of one pretty girl would be fatal; but it was all right where two were concerned, especially sisters, and with no careful mother to construe intentions. Otherwise, in Ridgecombe's opinion, Clewes was as good as dished.

Christmas over, the young ladies left, and Clewes found himself a lone man again. He was

still occasionally asked out to Menna's, when there was young company, and he had Ridgecombe once more; but the gay days were over. When he met Virginia, he wished he could meet her more often; but he felt as yet nothing more than a philandering admiration for her. The heart-pangs were quick to die down in the young ladies in London, but quicker far in their In a week or two he was thinking Virginia the nicest girl he had ever met, and admiring in her the reverse of the qualities he had thought delightful in the others. He had been attracted by them because they were kittenish, flirtatious and lively; he was attracted by her because she was hard-working, straightforward and serious. The two dethroned queens of his heart were still given to palpitations and blushes on his account while he was comparing them unfavourably with Virginia.

She had relapsed into her grave demeanour again, but was not harassed as she had been in autumn. But as spring drew on, she began to feel the worry that had been on her before, and instead of a steady morose serenity, she felt flashes of pleasure alternating with distrust. She was feeling too much attraction to Clewes, and feared herself and it. While he philandered

with pretty misses, she was safe; when he paid herself attentions, he was not safe, and her safety was dependent on his. She was the first to suspect their mutual liking, because she was in dread of it. But Ridgecombe soon discovered that Clewes was growing attentive to Virginia, and was indignant at his behaviour. Carrying on here, there, and everywhere with pretty girls is a young man's prerogative, but there is no excuse for exercising it with anyone situated as Virginia was. Ridgecombe was no busybody, and he hung back from anything that would perhaps wound Virginia or offend Clewes. He realised suddenly from something that Clewes said that the young man did not understand her position.

The following day he shared, as usual, Clewes's table at lunch. They made a habit of sitting for a while over their coffee, unless the weather tempted them out, and as it rained they lingered until all the other lunchers had gone. The room was quiet; a German boy collected dishes and tidied the place; otherwise they were alone.

"You know the Mommerys well," Ridge-combe said.

Clewes told him how he had met them first on Heckledon Heath.

- "At that time, really! You know the poor girl was there with her husband, who was out of his mind, don't you?"
- "Brother," corrected Clewes, not even startled.
  - "No, she's an only child. Her husband."
- "No, her brother," Clewes persisted. "I know from the man who looked after him."
  - "His attendant?"
- "Yes, a patient of mine. He told me how the poor fellow, who was off his top, got worse and tried to kill them. So they had him put away."
- "That's true, all except the relationship." As Clewes looked so certain of his own information, Ridgecombe gave him the whole story, deed poll, dead baby and all. The young man was much shocked. His first feeling was of generous pity. Ridgecombe was thoroughly ashamed of the suspicion that had made him tell the story; but he was glad it was told nevertheless.
- "It is common knowledge," he said, as they stood on the step opening their umbrellas. "She takes the 'Miss' for convenience. Well, so long. I'm going into the post office."

In there he met Virginia. They had been acquainted for many years and he was privileged to comment on her looks. She denied that she

was overworked, but admitted that she was sometimes worried. "I really haven't too much to do," she said, "sometimes not enough." He was reassured on her behalf, and again a little ashamed of himself. While she worried about Arnold she would not, he supposed, be feeling tender towards another.

#### CHAPTER VIII

fore speaking to his friend, from a fear that his taste might be questioned. He had never supposed his sense questionable, or that his interference might hasten what it was meant to prevent. Clewes would have gone on admiring Virginia while there was no one else to admire, but never would have fallen deeper in. He was by nature fond of light-heartedness; Virginia was not the type of girl to appeal to him as a general thing; and he paid her attentions because there was no other young lady handy. In his feeling towards her there was nothing more serious than this.

Once he knew her position, however, his ideas changed, and because he could not have her he wanted her. He had meant to marry some day, without any hurry or any particular plan; and he had had some vague kind of ideal wife in his head, whenever he had troubled to think about it. This spirit-wife was as unlike Virginia as it was possible to be, and approximated more to the fluffy little cousins and their type.

Pity, wounded vanity, and interest now began to make him rage; he had been a philandering suitor—every girl's lover; he suddenly became a hot pursuer of one, the one he could not have. No neater way of entangling him could have been devised by the keenest matchmaker than this information of Ridgecombe's. The advancing spring took him out of doors more often, but he saw her more rarely. After his talk with Ridgecombe he was frantic to see her, and would, if he had met her that day or the next, have blurted out his new passion. Happily for her, they were kept apart by chance for above a week, and he was cooler when they met. To his first selfish excitement had succeeded delicacy and caution; but he was still deeply in love. She noticed this change in him at once, and was decidedly worried by it. They had met on the road above the town: he was coming down from a visit to the Cottage Hospital and she was climbing for relaxation between classes. He turned aside with her on to the grassy pilgrims' track. After a few remarks of an ordinary nature, to which he answered with a fervour which they did not call for, and which frightened her, Virginia said bluntly, "I think you know I am married?"

"I had heard so," he said, flushing a little.

She was not looking at him, and he saw that she was neither pale nor red, except for the colour her climb had brought up. It was difficult for her to speak after this, and impossible for him. She said presently that she must turn; her time was up. He turned with her, but when they came to the downward road, he fell back, and she seemed glad to go on alone.

He was engaged to dine with Ridgecombe at the Eversley Imperial. This was occasional jaunt they indulged each other in; it meant changing and eating an elaborate dinner, cooked so-so, in a glaring ugly room; but these things were all part of the fun. There were a good number of people to be seen when Clewes arrived, and most times he would have found great contentment in staring about him and attracting attention. His size and good looks brought him to the notice of various visitors, chiefly ladies, but he could not now return their glances, or get much pleasure from their interest. Ridgecombe was soon tired of his dull companion, and gave up trying to screw talk out of him, pleasing himself with staring for both. They played billiards later, making the acquaintance of some men from London, whom Ridgecombe found so agreeable compared with Clewes that he deserted his guest

altogether. This suited Clewes's book better than society and entertainment for once. He went into the lounge, confident of being alone, when he was greeted by Virginia's two pretty cousins and introduced to their parents. The girls took up their intimacy where it had stopped, but a natural alarm at this before their parents, and a dislike of all that was not Virginia, kept Clewes cool and formal. Such a change wounded the girls, though it seemed quite correct to their mamma. When Ridgecombe joined them, seeking his friend, both men were asked to dine the following night. There was no refusing, however much both would have wished to avoid such a feast. Clewes imagined he would have accepted gaily enough if Virginia had been going, but when he arrived the next evening and found her there, he was unhappy. Neither had expected the other, and the circumstances made them constrained.

Altogether the party was no success, although it seemed so, as most parties where expense is no object have a way of appearing. Virginia was ill at ease, Ridgecombe was bored, Clewes embarrassed, the young ladies piqued; only their father and mother found pleasure, he in gorging and she in being hospitable, though

they too had the future darkened by the knowledge of a big bill. The mother, however, had made inquiries into the prospects of Clewes, whom she eyed with the affectionate savagery of a mother-in-law.

The young man was no willing victim; but willing or not, he was marked as a sacrifice of some sort. The family were due to stay for some weeks, and he foresaw himself pestered to death with their attentions. He was right. They would not leave him alone. Before the evening was out, he was being included in half a dozen schemes for sightseeing, which he had no skill to escape. Ridgecombe was older, and though eligible not at all fascinating; he got out of the toils easily, and with his civility unimpaired.

When Virginia was able to speak to Clewes privately, she shook her head, and sighed. "I'm afraid you don't care for all these plans."

- "Was it as clear as all that? Oh, I say!"
- "Nonsense. But I am sorry. I let you in for them first. I didn't know what they were capable of. Four to one—it's such fearful odds."
- "And how can man die better?" This was the extent of their intimacy for the evening, and indeed for three weeks; and it was

tantalising to see her as often as he did after this, in the company of the London cousins.

A happy day arrived when these troublesome persons must leave Boiswood, and when Clewes felt he could walk about the town without having to skulk. He celebrated his release by taking a long country walk with Ridgecombe. They walked so far that on the return journey they were forced to sit by the roadside for a while, waiting for some cart or trap to pick them up. While they sat there, delighting in the rest to their limbs, Clewes had the audacity to put his case to Ridgecombe, hypothetically. So secure had Ridgecombe grown in mind about Virginia and his friend, that the deception served. They were well on into the discussion before he saw its application, and he had already expressed himself with perfect frankness. He felt at once a little huffed at being so taken in, if he were being taken in, and more than a little alarmed on Virginia's account. But he was able to smother both emotions and to go on with the talk in a tone of idle interest. The subject was nearly through, and he could revive it only by this speech:

"I speak as a private individual, of course, with no legal or religious bias,—or at any rate, as little as possible in this wicked world. And I

must certainly say that apart from cut-anddried conventional morality—which I should rule out—the man should wait for the woman to speak first, to take first move, whichever happened to be, conventionally, the free party. Seeing, you know, that the woman loses most." The necessity would never have occurred to him in a purely imaginary case; it was only Virginia's interest in it that gave him the idea.

Clewes looked at this position, and could find no answer at once. A cart came in sight while he was still pondering it, and the discussion was never renewed. For days afterwards he studied this last remark of Ridgecombe's, and was struck by its equity. He could not get round it in his own conscience. He thought it the most honest attitude he could take up, and abode by Ridgecombe's oracle completely. Once he was so decided, he felt happy and comfortable, and Virginia caught his security without knowing its reason. He had impatient hours, but it was not difficult for him to control himself: and she had hours of expectancy and mistrust, but was, for the most part, very content. She had reached the frame of mind which most women know-a pretended satisfaction in friendshipwhen news came to her of Arnold. He had had continued long spells of recovery and no return of violence; he now wanted to have Mortlake back, and his medical attendant had written to Mr. Neace on the subject. They had lost touch with Mortlake, and an attempt to find him from one address to another was useless. Virginia went to Ridgecombe for advice; she did not wish to advertise openly, as it would be arousing interest in her affairs again. Ridgecombe suggested putting advertisements in the papers under the name of some London solicitor, and promised to see to it for her.

She had gone to his office, and when the business was decided she stayed to take tea with him. The reopening of the subject of Arnold had distressed her, and she was glad to rest and talk of other things before going out into the street. But though she tried she could not talk away from that one matter.

- "What is my position?" she asked, when he had tried other subjects in vain.
- "A very difficult and unnatural one," he answered.
  - "Yes. There is no release for me."
  - "No. None."
- "Of course I couldn't marry again, could I? Suppose I did?"
  - "Legally? That would be bigamy."

"That sounds rather coarse," Virginia said, with a forced smile. "At least, it would have once. Now it just seems a way out."

"Not exactly. There is a severe punishment for bigamy."

"Prison do you mean, really? I never knew that!" she said, then laughed outright, but with too little merriment for him to join her. He kept his grave look, and waited for her to speak on; but she had nothing more to say. A pause was uncomfortable for him, for he was charged with thoughts which he had rather forget. He said: "There is only one way out that I know of, and that is to disregard the old conventions." He paused, but she made no remark, though her look was on him. "In that case the law can't touch you."

"You mean living with a person without marriage!" she exclaimed. "Isn't that punished if it's found out?"

"Only by society. But that's a far worse punishment than by law, you know."

"Yes, of course," said Virginia, who had not thought about it before in these terms. "Yes, I see. The position is, then, that I am a single woman forbidden to marry, by the law and by society."

"That's the position."

- "Well, it makes it easier to be virtuous," she said dryly.
  - "Perhaps that was the idea."
  - "Was it?"
  - "I don't know. I'm only surmising."
- "Well, never mind me and my affairs," she said more cheerfully. "I'm generally contented and it is very nice having home still as I have, and the Stone, and mother. Thanks for the tea, Ridgey; I shall send you a thankoffering of some of my very best plum cake. Now I'm off. I'm going home on the five to-night."

As soon as she was gone he was filled with distress. He snatched up his hat to follow her, but could not make up his mind one way or the other.

#### CHAPTER IX

ER train was due to go at five-one. Ridgecombe started to the station at once, deciding to catch her on the platform, but he arrived there twenty minutes early, and had time to change his mind again and again before she came in. He was at that moment so undecided that he hung back, and she passed him without notice, going directly to the bookstall. As usual the bulk of the people on the platform were idling about the stall, staring without buying. Ridgecombe could not bring himself to go up to her then and there. He slunk back into a doorway and lost in this prolonged waiting what determination he had gained, so that when she took to strolling up the platform away from the group of loungers he had no courage left to join her. The train went out fairly punctually, and he turned home with a sigh of relief, meaning to speak to her the next day without fail.

The next day he was as bad. He dreaded impulse and was the victim of his own delibera-

tion. He could not go to her rooms in the morning, as she would probably be busy with pupils; in the afternoon he was busy himself. He decided for the station again, and this time waited in the yard. She came for the five o'clock train again, but her aunt was with her. The next day was Friday. He saw the train in and out, but she was not in the station, and he waited about in the street outside until the next. He was so occupied with her affair by this time that he could not keep his secret any longer; he was not free to do his work while he bothered his head about her. He intended to travel to Hurst with her, and tell her in the train, or if that were impossible, tell her on the walk up to Menna's. He bought his ticket and went out to the yard again. When she turned the corner of Station Road, he moved towards her; but another was quicker. Clewes almost ran from the hosier's shop to meet her.

Ridgecombe turned aside into the hosier's, unseen by them. How ridiculous of me, he thought, to suppose that he would take my advice! Better leave well alone. He can do it best himself.

The hosier was waiting with a civil smile ready. Ridgecombe called for ties, his mind elsewhere. The man offered his advice as to a choice between colours and black. Ridgecombe could see his couple walking slowly away from the station, as the train was not yet due. He lingered over his choice.

- "Do you find people take your advice as a rule?" he asked, as he let the shopman single out the ties for him.
  - "Oh, yes, sir. They expect it."
  - "Expect it, of course. But do they take it?"
- "In ties and socks and so forth, yes, sir. But then my advice is always backed up by 'everybody is wearing this at present' or 'this is most exclusive,' according to the gentleman asking, of course."
  - "Which are there most of?"
- "Oh, 'everybody's wearing this at present. They're more comfortable like that—not noticed, you see. If I might ask you, sir, without liberty, do you find they take your advice as a rule?"

Ridgecombe chuckled. "Well, I think I may say they mostly do. From motives of economy, no doubt, seeing that they have to pay for it."

- "Ah, if I may compare them, mine is only making up their minds, while yours is laying down the law."
  - "Persuasion and bullying."
  - "Well, as man to man and as master to man."

"Very much the same thing."

"Very much indeed, sir."

The train could be heard in the station, and Ridgecombe could safely go out; but as his hand was on the handle of the door, and he had turned for a last word, the door was flung open in his face, and Clewes burst in.

- "I beg your—Hallo! You, is it? Wait for me. My parcel. That it? Thanks. Now how much is it altogether?"
- "Eight-and-sixpence, sir. You paid me. This is your eighteenpence change."
- "Well, that's done, then," said Clewes, who seemed full of satisfaction. "Good afternoon. Come along, now."

They went along in silence, which seemed to be joyous for Clewes, though it was very ordinary for his companion. When they passed a lady whom they both knew, and the young man had cut her, Ridgecombe spoke to him.

- "That was Mrs. Titmus just passed."
- "By George, I never saw her! Well, never mind, she's an ugly old devil."
  - "And here comes Mrs. Elliott."

The second lady was safely passed.

"What are you up to to-morrow afternoon?" said Clewes at last.

#### HOUSE-ROOM

- "Well, if this weather holds, how about a walk?"
  - "Right. Where to?"

202

- "Have you been to Quill Castle?"
- "Yes, but I'd love to go again," said Clewes, thinking of his last companion there, and remembering that he would pass Hurst station twice.
- "Then meet me at the three minutes to two."
- "Oh, rather, yes!" said Clewes. He had just recollected that he would see Menna's from the tower.

# . .

# CHAPTER X

UT the afternoon jaunt was not to be. Some weeks before, Clewes had put in for a post as dentist to the Lee Green Charity School. This institution was properly called the Elberry Foundation School for the Daughters of Gentlemen in Reduced Circumstances, and had been started by Mary Elberry of Lee Green. She had been the daughter of a gentleman in very good circumstances, and had married one after another no less than three gentlemen in excellent circumstances, surviving all of them, and so accumulating the fortunes that had not only made their lives enviable, but that had also helped to reduce other less happy gentlemen. Some inchoate wish of restitution may have moved her to build the school and to endow it, but she was to all appearances unconscious that any wrong had been done—and certainly she went the wrong way to work to better matters. On her death her ample fortune, with few exceptions, went to endow 'he school in perpetuity; and under a Committee of local residents who acted as managers the whole business was better managed, though the "charity" stigma was not done away. Among other improvements made by the new Committee was the care of the girls' health. Before, it had been left largely to Providence, except in the case of some disease unavoidably public, by spots or coughs; and beyond occasional visits from the local doctor, in such emergencies, no medical attendance was provided. This would have been well enough, if the girls had been made, or allowed, to live healthily; but they were the daughters of gentlemen, in spite of reduction, and had to sacrifice wholesome living to gentility. On the founder's death, the Committee appointed a doctor to visit regularly. This was a vast improvement on the old plan; for here was a man paid to keep the girls well, not to dose them when ill. After a few years of this scheme, the Committee went forward again and decided to appoint a visiting dentist. An advertisement was put into the local and county papers, inviting applications.

On the morning following Clewes's meeting with Ridgecombe in the hosier's shop, he received a letter summoning him to a meeting of the trustees. The appointment was for that



very afternoon, for the letter had been delayed in transit through misdirection. Clewes studied it curiously; it was not at all the sort of letter he should have expected from an institution of the sort he supposed the Elberry Foundation to be—paper, writing, and matter were common; but there could be no doubt of the genuineness of the thing, for the letter was headed, and the envelope was endorsed with a violet oval bearing the name of the school, and evidently made with a rubber stamp.

When Clewes arrived at the school, he found that he might not enter just as he pleased, in spite of his name and errand. The porter looked over a list of names, and said he was not expected. Clewes produced his letter, which seemed as much a surprise to the porter as it had been to himself. The man scrutinised it and him, and left him at the door while he went for advice.

After this untoward beginning, Clewes was prepared for anything, and prepared with reason. So far as he could make out, he was not expected by anyone, and he began to think the writer of the letter had played a joke on him. However, after a slow progress from one room to another, when he was allowed inside the gate, he came at last to the Committee. Their

surprise and discomfort were so marked that his, which had begun to wear off, became strong again; a private wrangle between the members seemed to be going on in public; but at last one man, who had the voice and manner of a leadet, quelled it, and a pleasanter atmosphere reigned. When Clewes retired, the Committee were in good mood, and had given him to understand that he was successful. He left the school grounds, and strolled away towards the station, with a long time in hand to idle away. A sign-board at a side lane attracted him, and he stepped out of the way to find the Bandishire Man Hotel, renowned for Bandishire Pale Ales, and Centre for Fly Fishing on the Threed. The lane ran steeply down, and opened on to the narrow river, finely set off by a group of great trees, and meadows running roundly up on the opposite bank. The house itself was modern, handsome, and large, with a farmyard rising on the hill which he had just come down; apart from another sign-board built above the lane yoke-wise and the gateless entry into a gravelled court, the house might easily be taken for a gentleman's residence. Clewes went in and found that this impression was not lessened by the interior. The place was built and furnished with taste, and kept in perfect order.

AT BOISWOOD

The noise and smell of an average country tavern were not here, nor were the worse horrors of stuffiness and tawdry furnishing, which "better-class" country hotels generally offer.

Clewes ordered tea, and strolled by the river till it was set. The afternoon was chilly but open; by keeping constantly in motion, it was possible to find the weather pleasant. He was joined by a boy of fourteen, who offered to show him the ruin. Clewes went willingly with him, even plunging into the sedgy meadow until his ankles were soaked. The ruin was nothing more impressive than a disused aqueduct which had been built to carry the waters of the Threed to the neighbouring meadow beyond the rich alluvial soil on its banks; and had run at right angles to the river, raised for the first two hundred yards, when the rising ground had met its level, and after a short distance it passed out of sight between bushes and sedge. A hydraulic ram still throbbed steadily at the point of its exit from the river, pumping water uselessly up into the trough, whence it was tumbled down in a busy shower a few yards along. The first part of the aqueduct was of stone, roughly worked, but beyond the troughs that received the water from the pump all was in disrepair and many pieces were missing. Later on, Clewes recognised some of these pieces in the walls and steps of the house.

The boy's enthusiasm for this plaything was so great that Clewes felt interested in it, and he could well understand how fascinating it would be to a youngster. A woman came hallooing out of the house, and the boy started to go in.

"Come along, that's for tea." When they had gone in, he called to the woman to bring him a cup and plate. "And I'll walk up to the station with you after," he said, "and show you the old pound."

When Clewes came to pay for the tea, he hesitated. "That can't be for the two of us," he said.

"Oh, Master Owen has his in any case," said the woman. "This is his father's house, you see, sir."

"I am the innkeeper's son," the boy added, with a grin.

Clewes was conscious of staring at him in some mystification, for the boy was, by manners and intonation, a gentleman.

The following morning brought Clewes a letter appointing him as school dentist. It was better written than the former and on official paper. He danced joyously for a few minutes, and then hurried over to Ridgecombe's rooms to boast of this addition to prestige and income. Ridgecombe was eating his breakfast with all a countryman's air of Sabbath custom about him. He was newly shaved and double shaved and tender. His shirt was fresh out of the drawer, its starched band chafing him, but he wore no collar. His toilet was midway between bed and up. Beyond his trousers and clean shirt he was not in his Sunday best, for his feet were in shamefully downtrodden carpet slippers, and his dressing-gown, which he wore open, was frayed and dirty. The tablecloth was stiff and polished, as befitted a Sunday table, and his letters slid off on to the ground as fast as he propped them up against the hot-water jug. After each avalanche he stooped; at each stoop he groaned or swore at the chafing of his neckband; at each groan or oath, Clewes derided him.

- "Foul hyæna!" he cried at last. "I know what brings you here so early—you have good news, and that's why you grin so easily at this unearthly hour."
  - "What! You know, do you, Paul Pry?"
- "Paul Pry! When I have to run down side streets to avoid hearing of it."
  - "Oh, come, come, Mr. Ridgecombe, sir, you

flatter me. I know I am a public character, but this . . ."

"Is it true? Go on, you're joking," said Ridgecombe. "I thought it was a French duck."

"True as I sit here. I heard this very morning."

"Well, I heard yesterday."

"A gentleman would congratulate me."

"But naturally you have none among your acquaintance."

Clewes had sat to the table and was now pouring deeply sugared tea into the basin, as there was no second cup. "You would be glad enough yourself to have fifty pounds a year," he said.

Ridgecombe laughed a Sunday morning laugh in three syllables. "Too early in the day to take to sums," said he.

"Not at all, if you are fond of sums. Fifty for one year, a hundred for two years. Or twenty-five for six months, or twelve ten for three, or——"

"You've left out one of the oughts."

"Fifty pounds, my poor fellow. Here's the letter. No, I'll hold it, or you'll drop it on the floor."

Ridgecombe read the letter in astonishment. "Really! This is amazing, Clewes. I'm really

glad. Good luck to you. Well, well! You to have it too!"

- "You said you had heard."
- "I was joking, and speaking about that fortune they're always giving you."
- "Another?" cried Clewes. "How much this time?"
- "Twenty thousand. Funnily enough, the man who told me that told me of the appointment too."
  - "Who was that?"
- "Paterson, the Reverend, my neighbour here."
  - "And did he know I had it?"
- "No, indeed he didn't. No, on the contrary he told me Jones had got it."
  - "Oh, was he in for it too?"
- "Paterson's carroty vicar is one of the Committee, I understand, and Jones is one of his dearly-beloved brethren, and evidently he meant him to have it."
- "If you mean Glamis, the man at Saint Martyr's, he wasn't there yesterday." Clewes followed this up by an account of his rather unusual experience.
- "There's interest at work," Ridgecombe said. "That's a funny story altogether. Tell me the sequel if you ever learn it."

## CHAPTER XI

HETHER there were interest work or not, Clewes did not care-He was officially appointed to a position bringing him money and reputation, and had come by it innocently. He had, moreover, a greater matter on hand than this business. Virginia was at the height of her fascination for him. He could not keep his mind free of her; he did not try very earnestly, preferring the pleasure of enslavement to the struggles liberty would entail. Since he had come to the intention of waiting for her to speak first, as suggested by Ridgecombe, he had felt the added delight of the man who knows himself honourable, without the pain of loss or of sacrifice which too often accompanies that feeling. He could see that Virginia was as attracted to him as he to her, for she was not able to hide her affection—though that affection might be removed from ordinary love between man and woman. Perhaps she showed it too much and too frankly to reassure him altogether; it

seemed less a flame of passion than a glow of sisterly or general love. She gave him no such glances as a man would expect from his mistress, especially a man acquainted chiefly with flirtatious women; but rather she wore a look befitting imagined Charity. The whole world might have met such looks and caught no trouble from them. Ridgecombe saw them occasionally, and was hard put to it to read them. It must be remembered that he was a single man, not skilled in love-makings and carryings-on.

All this while Virginia was still occupied with her husband. Mortlake had been advertised for in vain, and Mr. Neace had given up a plan he had made for taking Arnold away with him again. As soon as it was felt useless to continue the advertisements for Mortlake, Mr. Neace ceased to write to Virginia. He was as little willing as he could possibly be to keep her continually reminded of Arnold; he was keen to feel the painfulness of the girl's situation.

This whole affair of hunting for the attendant had kept Virginia away from Clewes; she had had all her loyalty aroused, and she could not countenance another's admiration while she was daily on Arnold's service. But in a week or ten days from the last mention of

Mortlake by her father-in-law, her fancy was vagrant again, and she could blush and pale for Clewes without remorse.

Meetings were rare between them. circumstance kept him hot, but it also kept him sober, for he had time to think between-whiles. Perhaps he did not make good use of these pauses for thought; it is a fact that he never questioned the future, nor saw beyond the chase, finding, like a good sportsman, his reward in the pursuit, not in the capture; and he would never have cast a look of love on Virginia if she had been his for the asking. The rareness of their interviews was not enough to keep him burning for ever, and Virginia, whose mind lived in the future, hoped—but not very honestly—that he would tire sooner or later of such an elusive prize. Human nature would have insured this happening in the ordinary run; but Arnold, who should have divided them, again brought them together. Arnold, I say; but rather his case; for he, poor man, is out of it altogether except as a sleeping agent.

Clewes had now to pay fortnightly visits to the Elberry Foundation School. He had bought a bicycle as soon as the roads seemed fit to ride on, for he was a trifle dandy in his appearance, and disliked getting muddy and wet. The purchase was made chiefly as practice expense, but Clewes privately intended to ride out about Hurst and Menna's Camp a good deal on it. It came, however, as a handy means of riding over to Lee Green; he saved a great deal of time by cycling, for the village was on a branch line, with trains few and far between, and he wasted hours changing and waiting for connections.

Spring was nearly in. A new green lay on the meadows, and the willows showed their first leaves. Occasional mild open days brought the scent of the country up in Boiswood streets, and even the winter winds that sobered spring fancies were made acceptable by their odours. Whenever the wind dropped, the warm days hurried on the growth of the year.

On one such day Clewes was tempted out of his homeward way from Lee Green to follow a side lane, where the hawthorn hedges were gay with green leaves. A way-post pointed along this track to Woodford Ford, and as this promised the Threed, Clewes went forward eagerly to see more of the waterway which he already knew at Lee Green. He reached the modern bridge across the river and dismounted, leaning his bicycle against the wall while he lolled about to enjoy the view and balmy air.

The river at this point was calm, compared with the stretch at Lee Green, where it dashed busily among stones and islets; here it kept a steady course, swift but quiet, and had made a backwater running along by the ford. The sun lit straight on to the east slope of the ford, which was sandy; and in the shallow water there Clewes could see a movement of some sort. He went across the bridge and down, and saw with delight a shoal of tiny speckled fish, ranging from half an inch to three inches in length, swimming in unending scurry in the warmth of the sunny shallow. He was straightening his back from this examination, when he heard the sound of running wildly. Not waiting to step on to the bridge again, he put a foot on the end buttress, caught the wall with his hands, and pulled himself up outside to stare over. A bath-chair was coming rapidly down the hill, steered or propelled from behind by a red-faced man. At such an unusual pace for that sort of vehicle it came, that Clewes was prompted to clamber over the bridge and run to stop it; for his first idea was, that the pusher had become the pulled, and that the chair was running away. But before he could act on this heroic idea, the party had arrived on the bridge, the little slope upward of the bridge

curve serving to bring the chair to a stop. It was now within six feet of Clewes, and he descended from his Peeping Tom station and came round to fetch his machine from the other end of the bridge. He was checked again in his progress up from the sandy slope by the extraordinary behaviour of the passenger in the chair, whom he had not before noticed. This person, an old man with bald head and cleanshaven face, was waving his arms grotesquely and squirming in his chair, which had been fastened at the wheel by a chain-lock; he was imitating the action of swimming reversed, as if he were trying to embrace some invisible and lively object, while he opened and shut his mouth ludicrously. Clewes had made one step up on the bridge and there stopped, staring; and was like to have stayed there for ever, if the man who had been guiding the chair had not stepped across to go down to the ford. Clewes gave way, then recognised the scarred face of Virginia's butler.

- "Hallo! Good afternoon!"
- "Good afternoon, sir. I want to wet my handkerchief."

Clewes was curious enough to follow him the three yards to the water's edge, where Mortlake dipped his handkerchief, to the terror of the small fry, and wiped his neck and face, which were already moist with sweat.

- "And how are you?" asked Clewes.
- "Very warm just this minute, sir," Mortlake said grimly.
  - "Did it run away?"
- "I wish it had! Run into the water here!" Mortlake said with a quiet voice belying the sentiment. "My master suffers from asthma. This is our walk when the wind's south. It's bad enough down, but it's the very devil up."
  - "What! Do you run up?"
- "I'm supposed to, sir. And are you very well, sir?"
  - " Fine, thanks."
- "Very good fishing here, sir. Look at that small fry now! A hundred yards above the bridge you get lovely perch. You'd hardly believe it, but my master is a wonderful angler. Time's up," he said, as a wheezy cry of "Hoi!" came to them. "Excuse me, sir."
- "I'll give you a hand up," said Clewes. And, in spite of the old gentleman's protests that he must really not trouble, that he was too good, that Mortlake could do very well, and so forth, he helped to push the bath-chair at a gallop up the hill.

He mentioned this meeting to Virginia, and

found her anxious to know where Mortlake was. Clewes could do no more than tell her the story of the asthmatical gentleman. Virginia laughed heartily at the idea of Mortlake's career down the hill.

"But I want to get in touch with him," she said. "Can you give me some better idea how to do that?"

"Well, I shall be going through there on Saturday week," said Clewes, "as I come back, and I'll keep a look out for him."

"Will you? Do, please. Tell him to write to me at Menna's."

Clewes might never have gone to that part again, but he left Virginia with the impression that it lay in his route. Saturday week was far off when it came to serving a lady-love; he gave his first free time to a journey to Woodford Ford. The wind was now north-east, and no bath-chair came at eight miles an hour down to the water. Clewes remembered the circumstance of the wind's direction too late, when he was already lounging on the bridge. Evidently it was of no use to linger there in such a breeze; he made his way therefore up to the little hamlet on the east side of the river, and went into the post office to inquire. But he was again at fault, and when there remembered too late

that he did not know the man's name, though he had heard it a few days before, as also at Heckledon.

- "Twelve penny stamps, please," he said to the woman attending. "And I wonder if you could tell me whereabouts somebody in this neighbourhood lives."
  - "Who is it?"
- "He is the attendant on an old gentleman with asthma."
  - "What name?"
  - "I don't know the old gentleman's name."
  - "What name the party you want?"
- "Gordon, or Mortimer, or Ford, or some such name."

The woman looked coldly at him, half suspicious that he was drunk, and shook her head.

- "The man I mean has a scarred face, badly marked," persisted Clewes. He saw he was failing, and an ingratiating look he put on confirmed the woman in the idea that he was a trifle drunk.
- "I really couldn't say," she said indifferently, drumming her fingers on the counter.

Woodford is nineteen miles from Hurst, or Clewes would have ridden at once to Virginia. He was delighted to be in her service and not

to be rebuffed either by difficulties or by the snubbing of postmistresses. Next day he was up betimes, and walking out to the station beyond Boiswood in time to catch the train Virginia came on. This was a legitimate way of meeting her and chatting, for they could walk up from the station together without anything unusual appearing. He missed seven shillings' worth of patients by the excursion, but he met Virginia, and could sit by her for five, and walk by her for four minutes. He told her at once of his want of success. They were alone in the railway carriage. She said: "How careless of me! His name is Mortlake, Mortlake. He was-hisattendant, you know, and he wants him again."

Clewes blushed deeply, and she blushed slightly to see his colour mount. After an awkward silence he said: "Well, I'll try again. This wind may shift before to-morrow week."

"Indeed it may."

He stared in front of him fixedly, and said: "Will he ever get better?"

"I don't know," said Virginia, with her mouth drooping at the corners. "I don't know. They don't know." The train ran along the platform and slowed down. "No one knows," she began again, "except me, and I

only know that it can never be the same." She would not have said so much if he had had a chance to answer; but she was at the carriage door, opening it for herself, and he was obliged to be silent. Boiswood station yard and High Street are not places for such a conversation to go on easily. But Clewes felt that she had begun to "take first move," as Ridgecombe had called it.

He was convinced of her advance towards him by her next act. She knew perfectly well that he was due at the Elberry Foundation School every other Saturday, and that he intended on this occasion to spend part of his time on the way home looking for Mortlake. It may have been that she was not satisfied with the rate of progress he had made in the search, or that she believed him to be halfhearted in a service that was her husband's, and not altogether her own; but she certainly appeared at Woodford on a Saturday afternoon when he was at Lee Green. She lounged on the bridge as he had done, and went down to the ford; but the wind was wrong; it blew from the north-east—no fish came into the shallows and no bath-chair on to the road. She went up to the post office at a brisk pace, to keep out the cold, and made her inquiry in a more reasonable

way than her messenger had done. But the postmistress was a soured woman; she was careful, and would give no information. "I really couldn't say," she repeated again and again, her tone becoming more and more indifferent.

"Well, suppose I were to address a letter to that person here, would you so far oblige me as to give it to him?" suggested Virginia, whose gentle manner was not daunted by the woman's snubbing.

"Oh, yes, I'd do that, of course," the post-mistress said.

Virginia thereupon bought a penny packet of stationery and wrote a brief note to Mortlake, addressing it in his full name. This she handed to the woman with a shilling for her trouble, and then went down to the ford again. There seemed little chance of meeting the bath-chair that day, and she went downwards chiefly because she thought it would be warmer by the waterside. The station lay three-quarters of a mile beyond the village upward, and she found that she must be turning in that direction for her train. The wind had now shifted, coming from northward. A chill worse than the east wind pierced her. The sky darkened. She saw and smelt snow in the black cloud; in a few

minutes she felt the first flake settle on her face and slide down melting.

This was no weather to be idling in; she quickened her pace for the village. The snow came in large flakes and settled in the road; but it was wet stuff, as quick to disappear as to fall. The northern sky was blacker yet, however; a further and more lasting fall was promised. Virginia read the message with a return of her old fear of the snow, since her illness on Heckledon Heath. She would not wait at the village baker's for a cup of tea, but, dreading to be stopped by the storm, bought some cakes there, and went on her road to the station. She had hardly got beyond the last house when a bicycle bell was rung at her side, and Clewes arrived smiling delightedly.

"Good afternoon! Come back and have some tea."

Virginia looked at the north. "No, no, thank you. There is a lot of snow to fall yet. I must get to the station first."

- "I'll see you there safe enough later."
- "No, I can't really. Look, I have a bag of buns."
  - "How many?" he asked practically.
  - "Plenty for both." She began to walk on.
  - "Let me look, please. I'm hungry."

She laughed at his friendly impertinence, opened the bag and showed four currant buns.

"Four halfpenny ones! Not half enough!" he said. "You go on, then, and I'll catch you up."

She went on, amused at his brotherly way, and pleased enough to forget the chill and the bad look of the day. The station waiting-room was hot; a fire of good coal generously used was blistering the varnish on the chairs. One genteel-looking woman was sitting beside it, smelling of scorching; the station was otherwise empty. Virginia drew off her gloves to warm her hands. As she went near the fire, the genteel person moved away, and took a seat at the centre table, turning over a pious calendar in large print. Her look and manner were as chill as the snow.

A few minutes after Virginia's arrival, Clewes came into the station, and she heard him ask the porter if his sister had come in there. The man directed him to the waiting-room, and he appeared grinning at the door. Virginia could not help an answering grin.

"Here I am," she said.

"Here you are. And here's the prog." He put a fresh supply of buns before her. "I'll just get him to label my machine," said he.

Virginia turned to the fire, but he was in at the door as soon as out of it. "Jenny, have you such a thing as a luggage label? He says they mayn't take it without."

She had to laugh outright, and covered her amusement for the edification of the genteel woman by saying: "A label! I'm not a walking stationer's. Wait though. Here, will this do?" and she produced from her pocket the remains of the penny packet of stationery. The envelope was addressed, the porter tied it on with string, the machine was propped against a churn. Clewes came in again and they sat side by side with the paper bags on their laps. The genteel woman drooped over the improving almanac, turning the pages idly, and reading the largest print inattentively. Her presence made Clewes and Virginia reserved; her gentility made the waiting-room seem a temple for superior beings; but there was no other shelter fit for this weather, and if she had been of the importance her withdrawal from them implied, they must still have intruded.

The bell rang from the signal-box, and Clewes went out for his ticket. The woman followed him to the booking-office; they passed on the platform, where the light, though uncertain, was better than in the waiting-room, and he noticed her general want of proportion—her face was too large for her head, and her head too large for her body. In turn she looked at him, and saw his bright good looks, which were not altogether strange to her, though she could not remember distinctly where she had seen him before.

As soon as he and Virginia were alone he said, "I said that, you know, to prevent misunder-standing."

- "To prevent!" she repeated, amazed.
- "Well, unpleasantness."
- "Yes, yes, I quite understood."

In the train the other passengers were only a couple of children, and he felt free to go on. "I haven't a sister, so I hope I did it naturally."

"Very well indeed," she said, with a smile. But she was grimly amused at the incident, remembering that she had posed as sister to Arnold for other reasons. At the same moment, Clewes recalled that his soldier friend had made somehow a mistake about Virginia's relationship with Arnold. As soon as the thought was formed in his head, he hurried to add, "But I don't feel in the least brotherly towards you, I assure you."

She tried to laugh at this, but she blushed and met his look confusedly. Ridgecombe's advice

occurred to him as he spoke, and he coloured a little too, from expectancy as much as from self-reproach. He was, however, so given to blushing, that Virginia thought nothing of it. His look was innocent, and she felt only a slight passing discomfort. The two children prevented anything painful, but were not oppressive enough to deprive their elders of speech. There was not enough intimacy, or enough courage, for the young man to remain silent any longer. He said, with some awkwardness, that he had thought it best to avoid any appearance of the unusual. His awkwardness enheartened Virginia.

"Yes, it was very thoughtful of you," she said, "and quick, too. Where are those last buns?" she added cheerfully, as she caught the stare of the child before her.

He had them in his pocket. He was as relieved as she that the revelation of their real feeling was put off. The convenient children had to be coaxed to take the buns and superintended while they ate them, which they did very dirtily. Virginia polished one small fat face with her handkerchief, and brushed sugar, currants and crumbs from the crevices of the little girl's frock; and Clewes, not to be behindhand, furbished up his little boy,

rubbed his face clean of morsels, tweaked his bow straight, and fixed his cap on with a slight rakishness. At the next station the children got out; an anæmic elder sister met them, smacked each red face with a family kiss, and collected from Clewes's hands the newspaper parcel, dinner-basket, and bunch of everlastings and dried grasses which were part of the travelling in state. He sank back by Virginia, pretending to exhaustion after the effort. "Oh, Jenny!" he cried in boisterous spirits, "I was meant to be a family man!"

This sounded so funny from him that she laughed, although she felt distressed. But as he did not follow it up with more than a laugh himself she calmed down; she found him more unexpected than terrible, more absurd than alarming. The door opened and a parson got in, so that they had been alone for only a minute. Their position towards each other was so difficult that both of them were pleased to see a third person. Clewes hopped out at Boiswood, and offered his hand to help her down.

"I go on to Hurst," she said.

At once she withdrew to the other end of the carriage, and he went away, although the train stayed five minutes in the station. She thought

his caution at the Lee Green station was wisely practised, and intended for the sake of both to follow it up. She was so tired by the variety of emotions which she had suffered during the afternoon that she could not control her thoughts, and as she sank back in her seat she was worried with the notion that she was, in spite of her caution, bringing trouble on to him. He was in a position which could be easily ruined. She decided that, whatever her own feelings, she would not sacrifice him, come what might.

As for him, he went out of the station forgetting his bicycle, and had to go back for it. The High Street was a river of slush; he had to walk, and he splashed along careless of the mud and cold. Snow still fell here, but in vast flakes, half as large as a child's hand, wet and slow. All the windows were lit and decorated, but the bulk of the Saturday evening shoppers were not to be seen. Those who must go about did so gingerly and in distress, trying hopelessly to keep dry feet in a flow of half-melted snow and mud. Clewes had never seen Boiswood so unattractive, but he was light-hearted enough.

"I shall see her on Monday. Hang a wet Sunday!" he said to himself, as he changed his wet socks. His sitting-room fire was low and the room chilly; he wrapped himself in a rug. As the fire improved, he dozed off, and presently fell asleep altogether. The porter's wife came up to ask if he would eat his supper indoors; her husband was just going out to the shops. Clewes sprang up dismayed, and could not for a moment realise where he was or what was asked of him. He thanked her for the suggestion.

"That will just suit me," he said.

"Well, it's such a dreadful night, sir," she said, "when you've been wet once and changed into your slippers too. I do hope you haven't caught a chill."

"Oh, no, I was just lazy, that was all."

The woman had heard him crying "Jenny! Jenny!" in his sleep. "You seemed a bit restless, sir," she said as she went out.

"And well I might," he said quietly to himself, when the door was shut. He had dreamt that Virginia was dead and haunting him.

## CHAPTER XII

HE next day Virginia felt seedy enough to sit over the fire, a rare state with her. In the afternoon before the post left, she walked to a north window and scrutinised the sky.

"We shall have more snow," she said.

"I'm afraid so," her mother agreed.

"I think then that I shall put off my class." She wrote thereupon to her pupils, and laid the letters in the hall.

"Will you take them, Jenny?" her mother asked. "Jessie has gone already."

Virginia sat down in the hall and drew on the family goloshes, which hung there ready for odd incursions into the wet. She looked very unwilling, but Mrs. Mommery had not seen her face. The pillar-box was not much more than a hundred yards from the gate, but before Virginia was back she was trembling with the cold, her fingers were dead, her head was spinning. She sank down in the hall where she had sat before, and sighed. The sigh was as like

a sob as could be; Mrs. Mommery came out scared. "My dear girl!"

"I'm going to be ill again. My sight is bad," said Jenny gloomily. "There, help me to bed." She was unstrung at the arrival of the snow. All the horror of her experience on the Heath had returned; she was almost hysteric with fear, and her sight was actually narrowing as it had done before. Mrs. Mommery hurried her up to her room, Flolly lit a fire, and they packed Virginia in with hot-water bottles and blankets. The blindness was past within an hour, and the girl dozed away while her mother was watching her. The sleep was not a healthy sound one, but rather a state of partial unconsciousness; every now and then tears trickled from between her closed lids. As the evening drew on, she became more settled, and Mrs. Mommery slipped away to supper, which she and Flolly ate in silence with the door open. They had nearly done when they heard a crash. They ran upstairs to find Virginia tossing and muttering. She had thrown off the bulk of the blankets, and one hot-water bottle had tumbled to the floor, and there lay broken, with a patch of steaming moisture on the carpet. The noise of its fall had not woken Virginia; she was in either a nightmare or a delirium, and her

mother shook her to wake her out of the former. But Virginia was past such easy means, and when they examined her they could see that this was no ordinary disturbed sleep. Her hands, which had been grey and numb, were now hot and dry; the skin of her face and breast were the same; she fidgeted arms and legs continually, or threw her head from side to side. They covered her again, for she had tossed away the bedclothes; and while Flolly cleared away the broken bottle, Mrs. Mommery laid cloths damped in vinegar and water on Virginia's brow. By degrees they cooled the room, and Virginia began to calm down. Flolly was all for running out for the doctor; but Mrs. Mommery decided that it was not necessary-Virginia had been like that at the cottage; the attack was more than half hysteric. The cooling of the room cured the girl for a while. By the time Jessie was in, and the house was to be shut for the night, Virginia was asleep and quiet. Miss Mommery went off to bed, but she slept little. She was unaccustomed to sickness, and had felt more alarm than she showed. After a few restless hours, she crept into the girl's room and insisted on her sister-in-law's going to bed. Her movements and voice half roused Virginia,

who started another wild muttering, more coherent than before. She beat back her mother's hand, and sat up, talking fairly distinctly. "No, it wouldn't. Nothing would stop me if I thought it right. That's a matter for me, and I'll act in a moment if I think it right. . . . I shall do what I like. What is my position? A most unnatural position.... There is a severe punishment for bigamy, how ridiculous, you know! That is no way out. The way out, yes, you have it, disregard the old conventions. Well, and Society punishes that. . . . I am a single woman, and I am not allowed to marry. Well, Society can go hang and do its worst, for all I care, for all I care, for . . ."

Mrs. Mommery clapped a hand on her mouth, for the girl's voice was rising, and soon the servant would be roused. Virginia stared at her angrily, but she could not struggle, being too exhausted. She said: "All right, Mother. I shall be quite all right presently. I never got to Mayhurst after all."

"I could have stopped her before," Mrs. Mommery said drily. "See if Jessie is roused, will you?"

Miss Mommery came back with the news that the servant was not moving. By this time

## 236 HOUSE-ROOM

Virginia was thoroughly worn out, she breathed short and lay heavily. They made her drink some hot milk, and then, as neither of them felt fit for sleep, sat one each side of the bed shivering. Mrs. Mommery dozed from time to time, but her sister-in-law never ceased in prayer until the morning dawned.

## CHAPTER XIII

SNOWY Sunday and a slight chill had kept Clewes indoors, pitying himself very much. For a few days he stayed in this self-pitying state, for the window opposite showed him no Virginia. But the cold snap had raised the devils of toothache in Boiswood, and his rival was away, so that the young man was very busy, and his cold passed away without undue attention. But when Friday came and he had not seen Virginia since their jaunt together, he began to feel anxious. He did not care to inquire openly after her, as he was afraid of compromising her; he would not write, in case he should compromise himself. therefore, bicycling to Hurst on Saturday, in the hope of seeing her by chance; but the roads were so bad that he could not manage the journey, and had to turn back after a few miles, exhausted and splashed with clayey mud. The snow was long past and forgotten in the steady fall of rain which had kept on for above a week. He spent another Sunday indoors, and another week without a sight of

Virginia. Perhaps he would have been more careless of consequences to both of them and more rash in his search for her if he had not been somewhat fascinated by a new patient. This lady was young, good-looking and gay. She came originally to have an aching tooth relieved while her own dentist, Dr. Jones, was away, but the young man pleased her more than the old one, and she discovered that she must have all her teeth seen to, regardless of expense, and that she had done with the family dentist for good. Her fascinations were too strong for Virginia's ghost to have any chance. For five days the new love reigned undisputed in the fickle swain's heart; Clewes thought of Miss Almond at his work, and looked forward from day to day for her cheerful visits. Then she gave place to Virginia again through her own fault; Clewes saw that she was making a set at him, was being forward, too inviting and friendly. The contrast with Virginia recalled that deposed deity; he finished his new patient's teeth, and cast her out from his heart for ever. He now began to think increasingly of Virginia, who was still nowhere to be seen. For a fortnight she had not appeared at the window, and the seedsman's wife came occasionally to air the rooms—a fact which made it clear that Miss Mommery was not present. Dangling after the forward Miss Almond had brought the second week since the visit to Lee Green to a close, and he was obliged to go on Saturday out to the school. The roads made cycling impossible; Clewes went by train, and after his attendance walked down to the "Bandishire Man" for tea and shelter.

His boy-friend was standing in the drenching rain at the entry, watching a man at work on the porch roof. He left this occupation, which had grown stale, for the more important one of talking to Clewes.

- "It's a fine day for young ducks and aqueducks," said Clewes as he shook his umbrella out.
- "Such a lark!" cried the boy. "The old cat got on the porch after a bird and knocked a tile out of place, and after dinner father was snoring out here and the rain suddenly poured down his collar in a river!"
- "Did you laugh?" asked Clewes, enjoying the lad's amusement.
- "Whew! Not I! They've been making marmalade," he said, breaking off as the attendant came into the room. "We'll have tea, fair Mistress Warren, and lashins of new marm."

"Yes, tea, please," said Clewes, "and enough marmalade to float a good-sized boy."

"And Lord-love-a-duck!" went on the boy when the woman was gone, "he was fit to kill Tiddler when he found out what it was! You ought to have seen the way he looked! And the old dear stayed up on the roof out of reach putting his paw to his nose to him. Ha, ha! Me laugh! You've not got a father, young man. or you'd know better." He continued in this disrespectful strain until tea was brought, showing meanwhile his stamp-album, which contained a very good collection of Colonial stamps. They had nearly finished tea, at which the new marmalade figured importantly, when the door opened. The boy, who had reached that stage when the waistcoat is an impediment, and jam has coated the hand to the wrist, trimmed his position and expression to good manners, and Clewes turned in curiosity to find in the new-comer that member of the committee who had been so much in favour of his appointment.

"Oh, you, Mr. Clewes! I am pleased to meet you again!" said he. "Well, Owen,

what do you do here?"

"Just having my tea, Father," answered the boy politely, being wholly changed from the gorging monster of disrespect to a nicelybehaved little gentleman.

"Don't let him worry you, Mr. Clewes."

Clewes made some pleasant remark and went on with his tea, but Owen was ill at ease; he seemed tired of eating and ready to be away. "Well, off with you, my boy," from his father relieved him. He fled at once, and his father sat down in his seat gingerly, as though he ached. Clewes said: "I have you to thank, I believe, for my appointment at the school here."

- "Oh, that! You like the work?"
- "Yes, I like working on children."
- "Ah, you are fond of children."
- "Not so very," Clewes said after reflection.
- "No, I mean that I prefer saving teeth to replacing them."
- "Exactly the idea we had when we appointed a visiting dentist! That is the ideal."
- "Yes." Clewes could think of nothing more to say on that subject.
- "Will you drink a little spirits?" said the innkeeper.
  - "Thank you, no."
- "You will excuse me if I do, I hope. I've had a thorough shock to-day. Wet through and through! I think I must have a drink, just as a

tonic. A man at my time of life can't laugh at a chill, you know."

"Certainly not," murmured Clewes. A drink was brought, one which, to judge by the smell of it after the patient had drunk, was potent against chills and anything of a sober nature. Clewes guessed that it was not the first to be taken medicinally that afternoon; and the livening effect it had on the patient confirmed this idea. A desultory conversation on the weather and neighbourhood followed, then Clewes looked at his watch and decided he must go.

"Go! Why, you have a full half-hour!"

"Twenty minutes only, I'm afraid."

"Well, I will send you up in the gig. It takes less than ten minutes in the gig."

Clewes was firm in his refusal. He put out his hand. The innkeeper took it and held it. "Yes, I was responsible for that appointment."

"I am very much obliged to you."

"Not at all. Not at all. It was done to spite another man."

Clewes barely escaped an astonished guffaw. His patron went on: "Though I mean no disparagement to you, Mr. Clewes, not in the least. By no means that. No, but for years and

years it has been my one ambition to get even with a—well, a certain individual."

"Oh, yes," said Clewes, wondering whether to twitch his hand suddenly away.

"Unfortunately he doesn't know that I was responsible for his losing the job. What! you must go! Well, well." Clewes managed here to take his hand out, and made for the door. The man followed him, still talking. "Yes, he must be got to know in some way that will upset him most. He is a man to be careful of. I want to do him a bad turn. He is my brother, though you would hardly believe it. Yes, we went, the three of us, to Australia together, and there he stole my wife, a dirty baggage—a dirty red-haired baggage—and she took my boy with her. You'll scarcely believe that I rode day and night seventy miles to come to them, and steal him back-my Owen here. He thinks I'm still there. Well, I am glad I've told you. It may be another means of injuring him that you know. Perhaps you can let him know some time! Ha, that's funny!"

At this point Clewes managed to get away. He found the woman in the porch and offered her payment for his tea. She refused. "Mr. Jones said not, sir, really. I was to give you whatever you want whenever you came."

Clewes had to run to make sure of his train. At the hill-top he found Owen astride the wall of the pound.

"I'm going to be a dentist, I think," the boy volunteered, as they hurried along together.

"Good idea. Are you serious?"

"Yes, I think so. At any rate, the old boy has set his heart on it. It will be such a lark. I shall have to go to London to study. She's just signalled, so there's no need to sweat ourselves. I say, what does L.S.D. mean?"

"Money-pounds, shillings, and pence."

"Why, I thought it did. Does it mean Cash Dentist?"

Clewes was still howling at this when he parted from his crony, who took the laughter very pleasantly. He went past his own doorway in the High Street to the bicycle shop for a new pump-connection.

"Think it will clear up for to-morrow?" he asked.

"Couldn't say," said the shopman, stepping to the door. They squinted at the sky together. "Well, I shouldn't think so. See that dirty patch of clouds behind Dr. Jones's fir tree? That's a bad sign."

Dr. Jones's fir tree. Mr. Jones said: Spite a certain individual. Responsible for his losing that



## AT BOISWOOD

245

job. He is my brother. A dirty red-haired baggage.

Clewes went home less mystified, but considerably more interested. Mrs. Jones had red hair; Jones had married her in Australia—these were facts which he knew. Clewes thought the best thing he could do would be to keep dark.

### CHAPTER XIV

After her first night's delirium, she spent a weary day in bed, sickening for a bad cold, and a second night of disturbance, waking finally to a real old-fashioned snivelling cold. This went steadily through all its unpleasant phases. However, as the days grew worse the nights grew better; she snuffled and sneezed, but was no longer feverish; and her mother and aunt had no longer to share their unpleasing vigil at her bedside.

She was slow to recover, and seemed to give in very easily to the symptoms. This was foreign to her character. As a rule, she fought illness strenuously, and was a bad patient, believing in resistance to the death, and often, she herself thought, scaring away disease by her lack of welcome. On this occasion she was altogether changed, and stayed in bed for a cold which most healthy people would have faced out by rising, and many by going about their ordinary work. Whether this were the cause of its hanging about her a long time, or whether she was worse attacked than those about her guessed, it is certain that she was presently in the state of a real convalescent—weak in the legs, dizzy in the head, depressed and childish. Flolly had less patience with this imaginary illness than Mrs. Mommery, and it was she who insisted on Virginia's getting up when the girl was quite unwilling to leave her bed.

"Come, you can go back directly after tea!" cried Flolly, with encouragement. "But let us all have tea comfily by the fire together." She was thoroughly and suddenly convinced of the girl's sincerity, when, at the first step out of bed, the invalid's knees gave way, and she went toppling forwards, falling into a towel-horse, which in turn knocked a row of bottles off the wash-hand-stand into Virginia's boots and shoes. The girl had half fainted from dizziness, and was content to lie on the floor, her head among the towels, while her aunt rang for help and wrung her hands remorsefully. Virginia was helped back to bed, and there fainted away. This time Mrs. Mommery was no longer confident. She sent for the doctor, who prescribed rest. He found Virginia nervous and wasted. The cold

and fever were nothing; but for her hysteria she must rest and feed well.

Virginia had no wish to be active; she was happy to lie half asleep, dismissing thought. But as soon as she began to recover, her thoughts began to tease her, and she undid the good that the rest and feeding were doing her by privately worrying over her difficult position with regard to Arnold and Clewes.

Ten days of perfect rest set her up well enough. She would gladly have gone back to work at once, but it was thought wiser for her to finish the second week of idleness, and begin at the school on the following Monday. The garden was soggy, the roads were muddy, but she persisted in staying out as much as she could, watching the new season grow. She would not go visiting, having a good excuse in her late indisposition, and nothing that Mrs. Mommery could say would move her. One afternoon both the older women begged her to come with them to some house where all were intimate.

- "I'd far rather not."
- "You'll be all alone."
- "I don't care."
- "You will get the dreadfuls as soon as the lamp is lit."

- "Well, then you stay home."
- "Did you ever! You're a nice modern daughter, miss. Come along, Flolly, and we'll stay out as late as we can, to teach her better manners."
- "Good!" said Virginia cheekily. "Then I shall have some peace."

As soon as she had seen them safely away, she went pottering aimlessly about in the garden, perambulating about the Stone and braving the showers. A particularly smart downpour sent her in. She took her sewing by the fire, but she had scarcely settled when the bell rang, and she had to fling the needlework, which was strictly domestic, under her chair, and rummage out a piece of elegant embroidery. She heard a man's voice in the hall, and started into pallor. Ridgecombe was shown in. He looked at her with concern.

- "My dear Jenny, you are ill!"
- "Not now. I've been ill, though. How come you here?"
- "I've been to see your neighbour Lenny, and spent most of the day in his drenching, sodden farm."
- "Oh, yes. He's going to law, they say. God help him!"

"He's gone already. So you've been ill, have you?"

They talked for a little, without effort to keep up the conversation when it flagged, for they were good enough friends not to be scared of silence. Jessie brought in tea, the scone ready to be toasted, the kettle near boiling. Ridgecombe sat on the fender to make the toast.

- "What's that under your chair?" asked he.
- "Don't tell Flolly! It's mending of undies, and she would die of shame to think a gentleman had seen it."
  - "Is she out then?"
- "They both are. I'll ring for Jessie to sit with us if you would prefer it."

He grinned at this, but grew grave at once. As he returned to his toasting he said: "Jenny, there's something on my mind about you."

She sobered at his tone, and murmured, "Yes, Ridgey."

"You know I'm a friend of his," he said, darting into his matter at once. "And of course he knows I'm your friend too, so I was put a little in the position of family adviser. I mean, don't you know, that both of you came to me about it, so that a blind man could have seen through it. Well, what I want to say is,

that in any—I mean, I told him then, that in any such case, it didn't matter what the circumstances were, the woman ought to speak first. I believe I gave it as my opinion that no decent man would speak first, or something of the sort. Of course, I was only speaking my ideas like anyone else in a general discussion, but since you and I have been friends for so long, I rather think he is more impressed by my view than he would be otherwise."

"Yes, I see," said Virginia. He glanced at her as he knelt up to put the toast off his fork, and she met his look serenely.

After a silence, during which she had made the tea and buttered the scone, she said: "Then there is something else to consider. Your point of view was based, I rather think, on what I should lose. Well, how about what he would lose? It would mean ruin for him, wouldn't it?"

"I expect so," said Ridgecombe. "No, no. I take that back. I won't be led into any more opinions. I have suffered horribly from that one."

"Are you sure it was necessary—the warning, I mean?" said Virginia, grimly.

Ridgecombe did no more than shake his head, refusing to commit himself. He was

thinking as he did so, that he knew very little about such things. But his silence was better than any assertion. It gave Virginia time to think; and her reflection was that any backwardness on Clewes's part was now accounted for by this piece of advice. She melted from grimness to tenderness as she saw this; her tears welled up, pricking her eyes. She was on the point of crying, when she further reflected that there was no great backwardness in her wooer; and at the recollection of his extreme forwardness she smiled, and her tears were of no account.

Ridgecombe had no more conversation left, and he sought in his mind for suitable subjects to follow such an intimate one. But Virginia, who could have found plenty to talk about, was glad to be silent; she went darting mentally from one emotion to another, as her thoughts led—or perhaps her thoughts were led by her emotions. When Ridgecombe looked at her next, he saw her ready to cry, and destroyed her defence against tears by speaking kindly.

"Jenny, I do wish I could help you!"

She wept outright at this, having come to the decision that she could not speak first to her lover; not that modesty would forbid it, but the regard she must have, unless her own love were selfish, for his career, his future, his whole life. As she cried, now reduced to do so publicly and to hide her distorted face from Ridgecombe's possible glances, he had his turn of reflection, and followed her mentally along exactly the same path, arriving at the identical outlook, as she answered his last words.

"Best leave things alone," was all she could say. But he was privately making up his mind to undo a part of the harm he had done, by telling Clewes what had happened to-day. Jenny looked up more cheerfully, and bade him go on with his tea. "And pour me out another cup, will you?" Her tears now stopped, and she was restored to control, almost happy, but her looks were not ordinary, for she had cried freely, and her eyelids were swollen and her face stained. She ignored these signs before him, but she dared not face others, and at the sound of her aunt's voice she whispered desperately: "Do I look as though I'd been crying?"

He realised that this was a time for truth and not for compliments. "Yes, indeed you do." Virginia ran out, just too late, for Flolly had come well into the room, and had spied what looked like a tearful face. In Virginia's

chair, too, was a very wet handkerchief, crushed under the cushion; Flolly was no sooner in the seat than she found it. Her look became as suspicious as her niece's had been troubled. At one time she had set her cap at Ridgecombe, before age had too markedly divided them, and she had still a tenderness for every man whom she had once run after in her innocent way—provided he was not married to another. To see in Ridgecombe the would-be seducer of her niece was a cruel shock. Miss Mommery had expected nothing of the sort. She had come gaily in, and had felt pleasure to know he was there: but as soon as the suspicion was born, her face fell, and she could do no more than make a little heavy conversation until Mrs. Mommery came in, delighted to be out of the rain and to find a visitor at her fireside. Mrs. Mommery's own gaiety covered all awkwardness; and Virginia came back soon with a clean face and a bright look.

Flolly had had slight suspicions that all was not well ever since Virginia's delirium. Now these increased, and were magnified yet by her jealousy. She lived under a cloud of doubts, and her behaviour changed. Flat-foot by nature, she now walked on tiptoe, which

improved her health considerably; she lurked instead of going straight; and changed her plans for the simplest action in the most puzzling manner. Thus she left her work on Saturday afternoon to fetch Virginia to tea, instead of sounding the wooden bird-clapper in the hall as usual. Virginia had spent the afternoon upstairs, meaning to mend some shabby music, and had not yet come down. This was a common sort of occurrence: but Flolly was sour with suspicions, and thought the behaviour odd. She knocked only after she had opened the door quietly; and Virginia, taken unawares, started up as guiltily as could be wished, bundling away a paper as she did so. Flolly's aim was now to look at this paper. As soon as tea was done, she made an excuse to get Virginia out of the house, by sending her to see if the new mushroom-bed was hot enough.

"It can't be ready yet," Virginia said. "Tuesday or Wednesday's soon enough to put in the spawn."

"Dear, dear! Not till then! Well, I think I had better trot out and see if there are any on the old shelf."

"I looked this morning, and there wasn't a sign."

"Ah, but a muggy day like this." Miss Mommery rose with a rheumatic look.

"No, sit still, I'll go, if it'll satisfy you," cried Jenny, and she ran out, as free from suspicion as a kitten. She went off one way, Flolly another, while Mrs. Mommery cleared the table. Flolly ran upstairs straight to the book under which Virginia had thrust the paper. It was a small snapshot photograph of a man jumping a high tape; a line of tiny figures ran sloping away behind, so small and out of focus as to be faceless; but the jumper's face was clear, although his attitude, bunched up in mid-air, made the portrait difficult to Across the patch of sky was recognise. pencilled a date, and from this rather than from the portrait itself Flolly recognised the incident -Arnold's exhibition of jumping at the school sports; the line of figures was the array of his little boys, all lost in admiration of his performance. There was no time for closer look; Flolly pushed the print back where she had found it, and ran down to the fireside. choking back her tears. As soon as she had heard Virginia's report on the mushroom-beds, she ran away to indulge a shamed grief.

This then was Jenny's secret! No longing after other men, but mourning for Arnold.

Flolly wept away all her suspicions. Next cheap-excursion day she went to London, as she said, to shop, though as she had no money to spend the excuse did not serve.

She went to a flat in Victoria Street, where Mr. Neace was living, to ask him for a photograph of Arnold.

"A photograph! Yes, I have several, but none lately-none, I should say, since he was grown up. He never cared to be photographed, you remember, perhaps. But you shall see what I have if I can find them here. I only share this place with friends, and space is limited; some of my things are stored." He went in search of what he wanted, and came back with an old album. There were several portraits of Arnold in school groups, one only taken since manhood, and a poor one at that, for he wore that vacuous photographic expression which destroys natural character. The best was in a group where Arnold stood forward holding one side of a large trophy; he had evidently not been ready for the moment, and was turning a sly look on the other boy who helped to hold the vase. Taken off his guard, he wore a natural expression, and the portrait was very lifelike.

Miss Mommery gazed at it until her eyes

dimmed and she could not speak. She put out her hand to remove the picture from the album.

- "You want it?" asked the old man.
- "If I might," said she. "Just to have a copy taken—for Virginia."
- "For Virginia!" he exclaimed, in some doubt.
  - "I want to give it her."
  - "Is that wise—kind?"
  - "Why! Her husband!"
- "Yes, but to recall that. I should think it would be better for her to forget, as much as she can."
  - "Forget her husband, her duty?"
- "Certainly forget her duty, if you mean what I think you mean," Mr. Neace said. "She hasn't any duties to him any longer. She's a widow, poor girl!"
- "How can you say that?" cried Miss Mommery, harassed.
- "I'm offending you, Miss Mommery, I'm afraid, and I don't want to."
- "No, no, not at all. Do you mean he is dead?"
- "Dead! No, no. But Virginia isn't his wife now. She hasn't the privileges, so she can't be called on to remember the duties."

"Do you mean she is free?" asked Miss Mommery, who was ignorant of the Divorce laws.

"I mean that she ought to be, and that most of us feel she is."

"Free to—free for—free to——" she stammered along, wishing that he should help her out. He was too hard on her bigotry, and left her floundering among these new ideas. After a pause, during which she had remembered that her sister-in-law held something of the same notion, she said coherently, and with some asperity: "I for one don't consider her free, and I have the Bible on my side."

"Not at all," he answered calmly.

Miss Mommery ignored this, for she believed that she knew her Bible better than he, since she was a regular church-goer; and he made no fuller denial of her statement. She kept her hand on the book, and now drew out the picture.

"Then I may have it for a little? To copy only, you know. You shall have it as soon as possible."

"Yes, do as you will with it. I doubt if it will copy well, as it is so faded." He sighed as he put the book away and wrapped the card for her. She was glad to be off, and scurried

down the stairs with the slightest return to his courteous farewell. He stood at the door of the flat watching her hat dwindle down the long circular staircase, and though he was a civil man by nature and breeding, wishing her ill almost out loud. He thought to himself that if he had been sure she was the last of the old gang of bigots, he would have pushed her down the stairs and jumped on her corpse at the bottom to make sure.

She went away wondering whether she was the only Christian left in the land, and asking herself oratorically after the piety, devotion, and duty of the past. She felt as annoyed with him as he with her, and she was not pleased to see in her imagination the wistful face of Virginia looking at the photograph. But ghosts and thoughts do not prosper in Victoria Street, and as soon as she was out in the traffic of the pavement she was calm again.

She sought out a good-class photographer's shop where the copying might be done satisfactorily. A woman in mourning was in charge of the shop, and she sent up for one of what she called "the artists" to estimate the cost. While they awaited him, Miss Mommery had to wipe her eyes, the necessary look at the portrait had distressed her again.

"It seems that those we like most and lose first never have their pictures properly taken," the woman said, tidying shelves behind the counter.

Miss Mommery asked if many faded photographs were brought in.

- "Ever so many, madam. It's almost our principal work copying from old pictures. Yes, I don't know whether it is that we like to remember them when we were all younger together," she said, glancing at the date on the back of the photograph. The artist came down and estimated for the work. He went off carrying the portrait, while Miss Mommery paid and gave her address. She felt that it would be inconvenient to her to have it sent direct to Menna's, and therefore gave the address of her old servant who lived at Boiswood.
- "Boiswood!" repeated the woman. "Why, my old lodger went off to live there! I had a little house in South London, until my husband died, and we took a gentleman lodger. How we laughed about his going there! He said he would be so dull there he'd be sure to grow blue-mouldy!"
  - "Yes, it would be dull after London."
  - "Perhaps you know him, madam. Mr.

Clewes, the dental surgeon; such a tall young gentleman, and so pleasant."

"Yes, I know him quite well. I must tell

him I have met you."

"Oh, please do, and give him my kind respects, and if you would mention to him that my dear husband is dead of pneumonia. They were very good friends together, in their way. Mrs. Minehead, he'll remember."

Miss Mommery remembered as she walked away that Virginia had rooms next door to this young man, and must see him every day. Her suspicions were again ready to blossom, when she recollected the little photograph of Arnold at the sports, and cried shame on herself for the idea. But she could not make herself believe that she was going to all this trouble about the new portrait simply to please Virginia; there was some idea of protection, or recollection of duty, in her mind.

#### CHAPTER XV

N spite of long absence from each other —for a fortnight is a weary time in some circumstances—Clewes and Virginia did not at once meet when they might. As soon as the third Monday came, he was at his window, not for the purpose of seeing her, but because he must work; and she appeared at once. They exchanged a pleased nod, but there was no time for more. She was bound to get hard to work after her absence, and he had no time to be idling. This snatched intercourse, made up of an occasional nod and a grin, went on for three days. Clewes was uncertain of their exact relation, being still held back by Ridgecombe's advice; she was not sure of his feelings. Her decision never to speak to him on the subject of their mutual attraction, to call it nothing more definite, had wavered often; and the first sight of him looking happy and well had slewed it right over to an intention that she would speak. But her position was a difficult one. A man

can speak and chance it, on such delicate matters; a woman cannot chance it so bravely, and Virginia's situation made it all the harder for her to take any risks. Hours of thinking should have brought her to some conclusion; but she had trotted over the whole business in her mind till the subject was stale, and she was tired of it. But she was not tired of Clewes, as she knew well enough when she met his eye at the window. Ridgecombe had muddled along these few days in a good intention to speak to his friend; but he was a bad hand at doing anything at the right moment, and he put off his ready-made speech until the day before Virginia's birthday. This was by chance only, as he had forgotten when that anniversary came. Clewes therefore saw her for the first time after hearing what Ridgecombe had to say, on the morning of that day, destined, by no human prearrangement, to be a series of misunderstandings.

Virginia was up early, visiting the Stone. She was out before the sun was up, going through a performance or ritual peculiar to herself. It was a worship in which she was priest and worshipper, and sometimes, by a curious confusion of ideas, worshipped also. She was a fairly devout girl, a believer and a

communicant, but that was in the public eye under a roof, and because of her education; here she was a pagan or a savage, making her own gods and making them no higher than her own level. This peculiarity is perhaps confined to untaught minds, and is due, not to a lack of "education," but to an innate sense that what is best is in us. Virginia's Sunday God was unapproachable, but could be understood—a Being demanding respect, but not evoking utter confidence. Her week-day god was here in the Stone or in her secret bosom. a being like herself in kind, approachable yet full of mystery, not to be understood. This unnamed, unacknowledged, and perhaps unrecognised deity held first place in her heart at such times as this—her wooing, wedding, and all anniversaries were sacraments secretly devoted to it. The ritual consisted to the eye in no more than a clinging to the Stone, with cheek or brow or bosom laid against its castern surface; Virginia would handle its smooth sides and run her palm over the lower edge of the Thirl, but unorderly, and in such absence of mind that an onlooker would not have guessed that a regular performance was taking place. If the chief end of religion is to uplift, then Virginia's was the true religion;

if to make happy (as some believe), then this was again the right; if to keep in the strait and narrow way, which is properly the end of morals, this perhaps was not altogether enough. But she called it neither religion nor piety; at the most she would admit it to be a spiritual communion, but with what or whom she could not say.

Her birthday thus began well; except that as all festivals have the fault of recalling griefs and absences she was rather calmly content than gay when the sun rose and the household stirred. The sun's rising was not simply a convenient division of time on this day; it was an actual fact that a red flush threw up in the east, dyeing the Stone bloody, and after it came the sun large and rosy, ready for a day's shining.

The garden needed some tending, and Virginia busied herself among the kitchen beds until she was called in to breakfast. Her mother had made a small feast, with clotted cream, coloured eggs, hot bread, and some choice orange jelly; but she had no present. Since Virginia's eighteenth birthday presents had been dropped, for money was scarce and new things hard come by; and in their pleasant relation the necessity for such inter-

change was not known. Feasts were held as feasts, with dainties to eat, and flowers to deck the tables, and no more. But directly this meal was over, and Virginia was going to get ready for her day's work, Flolly sprang up and said tremulously: "A present for you, Jenny dear. A little remembrance."

Her tone and look made Virginia's heart miss a beat; the packet her aunt held out fell into her hand, and she drew off the paper without a clear notion of what she was at. One glance at the picture was enough, and she fled with it in her hand, but not before her face had betrayed such bitter pain that her mother and her aunt were aghast.

"Flolly, what is it?" Mrs. Mommery said, half-choking with emotion. Her sister-in-law slipped a copy of the portrait into her hand, and Mrs. Mommery fell back into her chair, too distressed to weep or exclaim. The sweet, sly look of Arnold's face, where the rest of the group were not visible to explain it, had a mysterious effect; he seemed to be glancing beyond those who looked at the portrait, into some pleasing sight shown to him alone. He had worn such a gay expression often in life; it was a holiday look, and could be trusted to mean his best mood.

After a few minutes of emotional silence, Mrs. Mommery looked up: "What's that? She's gone, I believe."

Miss Mommery's ears were less keen. She ran out into the hall to find Virginia departed; by the time her aunt reached the gate Virginia was well up the road hurrying along as though late for her train.

"To go without saying good-bye!" ejaculated Flolly. "She has never done so before."

"This has never happened before," answered Mrs. Mommery; she was piling plates on the tray and her face was turned away, but her tone suggested an unpleasant mood. Flolly was silent, having a certain respect for her sister-in-law when that manner was used.

The day passed dully for those at Menna's. In the early afternoon, Mrs. Mommery called Jessie into the garden, and together they worked at the job Virginia had started. Flolly felt neglected, as she was meant to do. She took her knitting and walked over to an old acquaintance at Kent's Halt, where she sat gossiping desultorily with a person whom Mrs. Mommery would not receive in Menna's camp. She came back by nightfall, saying where she had been, and the estrangement between them grew. Mrs. Mommery had been

soothed by an afternoon's gardening, and a solitary tea-hour; she had finished a few jobs that hung about; and all these circumstances had joined to make her in a good temper, which her sister-in-law's first mention of Miss Dora Leather had unmade. Flolly was purposely aggravating; her huffiness had been increased by her afternoon's employment, and she kept repeating such petty gossip as Mrs. Mommery hated.

A few minutes after Virginia's usual time of return, Flolly said: "She's late."

- "A few minutes only," said Mrs. Mommery.
- "I wonder she did not come in on the five."
- "Oh, she has got to work to make up for that holiday the last fortnight. I shouldn't wonder if she were even later."
- "To go off without saying good-bye!" There was no answer to this. "She never even said thank you!"
- "Well, Flolly, you deprive her of voice and then expect her to make speeches!" cried Mrs. Mommery.
- "She might have kissed me then," said Flolly, recognising that she was a little unreasonable.
- "Tush! I don't believe you know what suffering is."

"Laura, have I not known what bereavement is?"

"Well, Virginia hasn't," said Mrs. Mommery, sharply. Her sister-in-law let this pass. She began to fidget up and down the room, while Mrs. Mommery, who disliked this indoor perambulation at all times, fumed silently over her sewing.

These two women were good friends, and had lived together in circumstances which had endeared them to each other; but there was between them no such intimacy as made it safe to speak of certain subjects. Years bound them of necessity, as they grew more and more dependent on each other for common services and for habit's sake; but years were parting them also, for Mrs. Mommery was being somewhat translated into her daughter's generation, and Flolly was still rooted in her old ways. They both guessed and dreaded this division. Mrs. Mommery was sometimes astounded to find that she could stay in such close friendship with a person who was living say fifty years ago; Flolly was annoyed and alarmed at vague signs of her sister-in-law's apostacy from the style of the good old times. They would never have spoken, in the common course, until Virginia had acted, if she meant

to act. But their emotions and tempers were so worked on on this occasion that they forgot the ordinary forms that divided them.

After waiting a long while, Mrs. Mommery went out to see if the carrier had brought a letter, for this was the accepted way of Virginia's letting them know if she would be delayed. It was now past eight and no telegram would be likely to come, so that Mrs. Mommery, finding no message, ordered their supper to be served. Together she and Miss Mommery ate, but in silence, broken only by necessary remarks. They lingered as best they could over their simple meal, and then had it removed. After the table was clear, they settled to work in utter silence, which tried Miss Mommery's nerves more than ever. At last when the clock struck ten, she threw down her sewing hurriedly.

- "We must do something!" she declared, dramatically.
- "What can you do?" asked Mrs. Mommery, speaking quietly, but looking as agitated as her sister-in-law.
- "Jenny has never been so late in her life without letting us know."

Mrs. Mommery was silent, and bent her head to her work again. Partly this was because

she had no answer for the statement, and also she was trying to control her face, which she knew to be too full of expression.

- "Laura!" cried Miss Mommery after another effort to walk her feelings down up and down the room. "Laura! I must go to Boiswood! There is the train at ten-fortyfour."
  - "What to do?"
  - "To see if she is there still."
- "If Virginia had been there still she would have let us know."
- "She—you—she—it—it is—you—they——" Miss Mommery stammered, unable to follow her own thoughts.

At "they" Mrs. Mommery broke in, drily.

- "I should say 'they' is the right one. . . ."
  - "She has gone with a man!"
  - "I don't know!"
- "Oh, my God!" cried Miss Mommery, sinking back into her chair.
- "Your God didn't make the marriage laws."
  - " Laura!"
- "He made men and women to multiply on the face of the earth."
  - "In sin! O, wicked, wicked."
  - "O, cruel, cruel," Laura retorted.

Miss Mommery had lost all control of her feelings, and was sobbing angrily, her face upon her hands.

"I have prayed for this," said Mrs. Mommery. And, exalted by the wild scene, she clasped her hands, looked upward, and said: "Merciful Father, I pray Thee to give my Virginia courage to find happiness. Give her of Thy bounties and teach her to accept. For Jesus Christ's sake, Amen."

Silence fell on the word. Flolly was still weeping, but without noise. Mrs. Mommery was flushed and dry-eyed. After a little, Flolly went away without looking at her sister-in-law again. Loneliness restored Mrs. Mommery's control. After working for another quarter of an hour, she began to go her methodical nightly round, tidying the room they had been sitting in. This took some time, for Miss Mommery had fled without parcelling her work and the place was littered with her various pieces and baskets. When the room was all orderly, Mrs. Mommery took a candle and began to visit the doors and windows of the ground floor.

The doors of all the downstairs rooms at Menna's have a hole cut in them at the lower edge, Norman-arched, large enough for a cat or small dog to creep under. Such cat-doors are found rarely nowadays, but they had never been improved away from Menna's, and there with the original accommodation for man was the original accommodation for puss; each threshold had actually in it a worn track under the hole, rubbed down by centuries of furry feet. That leading into the drawing-room was most marked; this room had been the kitchen until the last restoration of the house, and naturally the cat track was more used there than elsewhere. It faced the front door exactly, so that whenever the wind was westerly, a cutting draught rushed in through the cat-hole, and the room was unusable.

Mrs. Mommery went from the dining-room, where she had been sitting, into the kitchen, saw that the fire was safely out and the door bolted; then she opened the drawing-room door, and saw a letter lying in the worn groove.

It was a note from Virginia, sent by the carrier's boy. He had rung but got no answer, for they had been in the garden, and since he had no wish to wait, he had run in and slipped the note under the nearest door, rapped on the door, shouting, "Hoi! a letter there!" and gone about his business. The note had lain

there since four o'clock. It said no more than this:

# " DEAR MOTHER,

"Mr. Neace is here, so I'm staying overnight at the Eversley. Please thank Flolly from me. Shall be home on the five to-morrow, unless I let you know. Love to both. Moffat takes this.

"JENNY."

## CHAPTER XVI

FTER an hour of mental suffering so intense and so resisted that the brain was unfit for daily cares, Virginia had been roused to other things by the arrival of her pupils before her rooms were ready. She had to hurry, and the sudden rush of work cleared her mind and lightened her heart. The first girl to arrive was a dullard, who came early, stayed late, and studied conscientiously, but never progressed; and Virginia was anxious to make something of her. presence of this pupil always aroused Virginia's greatest energy and patience. All the morning she occupied herself with teaching her, instead of resting every now and again, as she usually did. When the class was dismissed, she set the rooms ready for her afternoon pupils, and then went out to her meal, fearing solitude. She meant to go to a tea-shop in the fashionable Copper Street, but some girls she was acquainted with had just passed in there, and she was not in the mood for light-hearted

company. She went back to the little restaurant in High Street where Clewes had his meals. She was in long ahead of him. When he had sat down to his place and looked about the room, principally at the few ladies present, he caught sight of her paying her account. Even in the engrossment of this act. speaking to the waiter and counting her change. she wore an expression which told of the painful thought she was busy with; and so altered was her look that Clewes started and his cheek paled. Others who knew her, some by sight only, marked the haggard face, and knowing her history pitied her in their glances; she met none, or met none consciously; she was blind and deaf in her preoccupation. Clewes's appetite was gone, he had come in hungry, but emotion made him refuse food. Ridgecombe found him leaving.

"Busy, then?"

"Rushed to death. No time for anything," said Clewes, and went out without delay, not feeling fit for chatter or for sociable silence. He went straight back to his workroom, and sat down to look for Virginia. Her misery had infected him, his heart was heavy. She made no appearance at the window, and after about ten minutes' waiting, which seemed five times

as long, he sprang up, ran into the surgery, and wrote a note. This he tied to a small lump of plaster and threw into her opened window. She appeared at once, for she had been in the room and the missile had fallen near her foot. After a stare at him, which began halffrightened and ended half-laughing, stooped down and went away with the note. After five minutes he grew restless; a patient was announced; he still waited. Not until the plaster boy had come back for the afternoon did he give up his station at the window. The surgery claimed him all the afternoon. It was no use his sending the boy out of the way on all the errands he could invent, when he himself had no time to be sitting before the window. There had been, until the light failed, no further sight of Virginia, and no letter.

She had gone into her larger room with his note in her apron pocket, to be met by the seedsman's wife with another letter sent by hand. As the messenger was waiting, Virginia opened it.

# "My dear Virginia,

"I am here for a day and night at most. Will you see me? I should like you

to dine here, and stay overnight, if you would give me so much pleasure.

"Yours,

"E. John Neace."

Virginia wrote an acceptance and a note to her mother, gave both to the woman with a fee for the carrier, and slipped the bolt of the door after her landlady had left. Even then she hesitated to open the note she had in her pocket. A glance at her watch warned her that if she wanted to be free of suspense while her class was on she must be quick to read; but she realised also that if the note were going to worry her she had better not look at it then. At the last possible moment she opened it, and read nothing more startling than this:

"Why do I never see you now? Say when and where."

Her door was being tried by the first pupil before she had put the paper up. She was at once plunged into work again, and kept so for the whole afternoon.

As soon as she had done her hair neatly, she started for the hotel, for she had no dress to change into. It was still early for a dinner guest to arrive, but she knew that Mr. Neace's

invitation covered everything for her, and that he would be glad to see her alone for a while before they had to go down to dinner. She was right. He had taken a private sitting-room for the convenience of their talk, and she was brought straight to him there. After the necessary polite and friendly inquiries, he told her that she was looking unwell. Virginia had no answer to this, except that she was not always so.

"I hope not; it is not at all the thing."

"Well," she said, nervous of his scrutiny, and trying to laugh away the subject, "it is my birthday, and I expect I am feeling it."

The old man guessed at once, with wonderful insight, that Miss Mommery's gift had been made for this festival. He said: "Am I too late to warn you about a photograph?"

Virginia looked down. "Yes, a few hours too late."

"Ah, that was it. Well, my dear girl, I came because of that. She borrowed an old one of me to copy, you see. Her idea was that you wanted it, and I couldn't refuse."

"No, I am glad to have it," Virginia said, quietly.

"Of course, of course. Jenny, I came here to tell you my point of view. I have a right

to talk to you like a father, because you treated me as one, you know."

"Oh, my dear old pal, was I ever so respectful?" said Virginia, with an effort to laugh.

"Not over and above, I'll admit. But shall I say then that I've come to talk to you like a pal? That's better. Virginia, I know your aunt feels that you are bound to him. But I believe that she is the only one left who holds such a view. I am the second person in this world who loves him as you do; we are all he has, you and I, now that he is at an end, so to speak. And I tell you that you are free. know every inch of his wonderful heart and mind, and I know he would say so too. I want you to have your life properly, Jenny." He had a great deal more to say, but his tears fell, and his voice faltered. After an effort to go on, he had to lay his head down and weep. Virginia could not speak, but by keeping silent she could control her sobs. When he had calmed a little, she said: "I think he would feel so too."

"Yes, he would have no bigotry," said his father, "his heart is generous."

He had, as he now told her, much more to say on the matter, but the dressing bell rang, and they dared not go on with a subject so likely to distress them, if they were presently to join the public in the hotel dining-room. As soon as they were recovered, they were both glad that the subject was at an end; he because he thought she might be offended by his freedom, if not of speech, at least of idea, and she because she felt that others besides might have guessed that she had likings elsewhere, though Mr. Neace could not know of them.

Their evening passed pleasantly. As it was Virginia's birthday, they went to the theatre, and saw a poor play badly acted by plain people, and had a great deal of fun privately between themselves from the dignity of a box. The change and the excitement had done Virginia good. When she parted from her old friend in the morning, she was happy and smiling again. He was to come to tea at her rooms, and to go back to his flat the same evening. Her morning was very different from the previous day; she sang at her work, and bustled about with vigour. She had neither answered nor forgotten Clewes's question, but she felt in no hurry to write to him. At last, while she was washing the plates after her lunch, which she ate in the now happy

sanctuary of her own kitchen, she saw him staring into her window, and she smiled and nodded pleasantly. He seemed unsure of what she meant; and she suddenly realised that she was treating him rather coquettishly. went to write to him, to put his mind at ease, but no sooner was she at her window again than he threw in another of his missiles, this time hitting her square in the chest. laughed, he looked dismayed and amused, and she had the audacity to open it as she faced him. "Have you any objection to seeing me? It is important that we should talk." She was a trifle taken aback at the tone of this; she had thought him wanting to see her out of friendliness or of something warmer; but such an expression as "important" is neither casual nor loverlike. She had written that they would be glad to see him on Sunday out at Hurst, but she now altered this in front of him, leaning over the scullery shelf to pencil other words: "I shall be going home on the five." To get it to him was her next perplexity. She was not so sure of her aim as he, and had previsions of her note dropping into the jeweller's yard. Clewes evidently doubted her skill as much as she. He signed to her to stand away, and then threw in a weight

attached to a cord, the end of which he still held. She laughed again at this larkish way of exchanging letters, and tied her note on, saw it safely over, and then retired for the afternoon.

Her work was soon over, for she had arranged to have Mr. Neace early. At half-past four he was due to leave for the station, and she locked the place and followed him. As they went out, she saw her neighbour mounting his bicycle and riding out of the town. She guessed he would join the train later, and she was right, for when they had travelled two stations along the line, there was he waiting back on the platform for her to make a sign. She was not alone; a party of three rakish young men was in her carriage; Clewes looked in and bade her come out. He led the way into an unoccupied first, and leant out of the window to prevent other passengers from getting in.

### CHAPTER XVII

URING Dr. Jones's absence on holiday, Clewes had been asked to attend a patient at the hospital who had already been under his rival's care. In the ordinary way, she would have had to wait until Jones was back; but there was a shortage of beds in the hospital, and the doctor there was anxious to get this patient away without the fear of her wanting to return. It was without suspicion of any wrong that Clewes took up the case, accepting the doctor's summons as authority that he was acting as Iones would have wished. He had paid several visits, drawing a couple of teeth at each, when Iones came back, and there was no need for him to go up again. He bade the patient a friendly farewell, wishing her a quick recovery.

"I'd rather you kept on with it, sir," she said. "I don't so much care for Dr. Jones."

"Well, that's very flattering of you. But it can't be, I'm afraid."

"Then I hope we shall meet again at Lee Green, sir, where my home is."

"Oh, you come from Lee Green, do you?"

"There now, you mean to say you never recognised me!" she cried. "If that isn't too hard. But just like a gentleman."

Clewes had some vague memory of her face, and now that he cast back his thoughts, he knew her for the genteel woman who had shared the station waiting-room at Lee Green with him and Virginia. As soon as he remembered he gave a hearty laugh, in which she joined, though she did not see the joke.

Jones came back from his holiday in a pettish mood. He had caught his red-haired wife in a flirtation with a stranger at the hotel, and had paid fifteen pounds for the card debts she had run up. At Boiswood she was obliged to live very sedately, and such a life ill-suited her disposition; at every lapse there, her husband was upon her; on holiday she enjoyed herself, and unless he would sacrifice his own pleasures to the duty of looking after her, he must allow her a considerable amount of licence. He found, also, to add to the discomforts of such a holiday, the home-coming worse than ever; half his patients were furious at neglect, and the other half gone over to the

enemy. He was therefore in the mood to be annoyed with everything and everybody. When he found that his hospital case had been carried on by Clewes, he sneered at the doctor, said unpleasant things about his rival, and bullied the patient. She was none too pleased to be his patient again, and she was as uncivil to him as he to her; and in her freedom managed to let him know that Clewes and Virginia had been about together masquerading as brother and sister. The information, which she did not know she had given, cured his temper; he knew that Clewes had no sister, he recognised the person described as Virginia Mommery, and he was as intrigued about the affair as Clewes had been about the Australian story. Before his first day of practice was done, he had set the tale going; his wife had run a little further in her visits with it. They mentioned no names, and some of the persons who heard the story did not guess aright. The next day he was at it again, still with care and adroitness. By the third day he and his wife decided that they had no need to say more; the tale was well started, and its spread would probably injure Clewes, and pay him out for having got the Elberry Foundation School appointment.

But on the third day he was suddenly checked. His Vicar Glamis was in the chair, and Jones, who knew him prejudiced against the young man, spoke of the Lee Green affair perfectly openly, giving the names of both Clewes and Virginia. He wound up with a spiteful reference to the school appointment, suggesting that the trustees had chosen a peculiar sort of person to treat the girls at the school.

The Vicar was exceedingly shocked. He had no liking for Clewes, but he believed him a well-conducted man. He was, moreover, an old acquaintance of Virginia's, and had the highest admiration for the way she had done her duty in trying to nurse her husband, when every influence was being used to make them part. With every detail of her sad history he was intimate, far more than most of the people who had heard something of her life. This aspersion of her character seemed to him utterly unlikely. His concern, which he showed in face and voice, was not with her morals. which he had no doubt of, but with her reputation. He left Dr. Jones without a set plan, but trying to formulate some means of helping her out of whatever difficulties this scandal might involve her in. He turned down the

street towards his own home, with a silent prayer for guidance on his lips; the way led past the seedsman's and the jeweller's, but he did not notice where he was bound, walking with his gaze fixed on the ground, until he was brought up sharp by getting tangled in a dog-lead outside the jeweller's shop door. He sprang back, apologising absent-mindedly, and saw Clewes's plate within six inches of his nose. This seemed to him a call. He went upstairs and asked to speak to Mr. Clewes on a private matter as soon as he was free. The young man was getting his surgery tidy ready for the afternoon, before he went out to his dinner. He finished the job, wondering what the Vicar was calling on him for, and thinking it was for a subscription, hesitated still more before he went down.

The Vicar had prayed all through the street, and ever since he had been left in the waiting-room. When Clewes came in, he had gained fortitude, which in this case meant directness. After shaking hands, he said straightforwardly: "I have come to you straight from a man who told me a tale about you and Miss Virginia Mommery. The tale itself seems to me to be harmless enough, but its repetition might injure her, for she is in a position of great

delicacy, as I expect you know. I don't know what to do. It seems to me, that told by certain persons, and with certain suggestions, that story may do her incalculable harm."

"Miss Mommery is a great friend of mine," said Clewes. "What is this story?"

"All it is is that you and she were seen to be picnicking at a wayside inn or station, pretending to be brother and sister, with no other companions."

"Well, since you have been good enough to warn me of this," said Clewes, whose face was its usual fine blushing red, "I wonder whether you will go further and tell me who told you."

"I don't see why I shouldn't. In fact it is a duty to tell you. Dr. Jones told me. He had it from a person he is attending, who saw you."

"And are you the only person he has told?"
"Ab. I don't know I don't suppose so

"Ah, I don't know. I don't suppose so. And if I know the man," said the Vicar, trying to do his duty bravely, "I should say not. You are competitors. I don't know whether I am justified in telling you that he felt a little sore about that school at Lee Green. He was sure of that appointment."

Clewes paused a little, thinking. "Mr. Glamis," he said at last, "you have acted very

1

openly, and given me an opportunity to spare Miss Mommery—to say nothing of myself—some unpleasantness. Will you come with me to Dr. Jones's? I have a few words to say to him."

The Vicar was surprised. He considered the subject carefully. "May I first know what you mean to say to him?"

"I shall tell him to stop the circulation of that story."

"Very well, I will come," said Mr. Glamis, after another moment's deliberation.

Dr. Jones was taking the air between his Wellingtonias when the two men turned in his gate, and he could not run away. Clewes marched up to him directly, with the Vicar after him, and said: "Dr. Jones, I understand you have got hold of some story about Miss Virginia Mommery and me."

"Dear, dear! Is that the story—but that can't be true?" said Jones, with a twinkle of amusement in his eye.

"It's the story you told the Vicar here a little while ago. I have come to tell you to stop its going any further, and to take whatever means are necessary to contradict it to the people whom you've already told."

"Why, what affair is it of mine?" asked

Jones, who was now enjoying the young man's evident rage.

"And further, you are to give your word to me here in front of the Vicar that you will take steps to do so—perhaps we had better have your Bible oath."

"Oh, come, you are beside yourself, Mr. Clewes!" cried Jones, feeling prepared against violence and secure against any other form of attack.

"Or else," Clewes went steadily on, "or else I shall make public the story your brother told me."

"I think you are mistaken?" said Jones, with a little of his roguishness gone. "I have no brother."

"Then you can disprove the story when it is told."

"Will you not come indoors?"

"Yes, to hear your oath," said Clewes, and as soon as they were in the surgery, whither Dr. Jones took them for fear of interruption, the young man added: "Now for a Bible."

"You think I shall swear?"

"I don't think one way or the other. I know what will happen if you don't. I give you till midday to-morrow to find all the people you have told that story to and to contradict

it, and to follow up anyone else who has heard it."

"You are behaving in a perfectly insane manner!"

"Take your oath, now, and be quick, or I shall tell my story over my lunch at Mc-Leod's."

Jones found a Bible and took the oath dictated to him. "It will be a hard task," he said.

"It will be a harder contradicting the story your brother told me," said Clewes. He turned and went out of the room, and as the front door stood open, he went straight through the garden into the High Street. After a few steps he discovered Glamis at his side. Clewes was trembling with passion, striding along unconscious of his uncertain gait.

"Where are you going now?" asked the Vicar, gently.

"Oh! Off to my dinner at the restaurant. Will you join me, Vicar? I should be so glad."

The Vicar accepted, and his presence made Clewes's recovery to an ordinary mood more easy, for the young man was not obliged to talk with Ridgecombe.

As soon as Clewes was himself again, he realised that if a scandal had been set going

### **HOUSE-ROOM**

294

it would not be stopped by Jones's efforts, though it would be checked. More must be done to make things right again. He sent over his second note in Virginia's scullery and had her answer. Then with what patience he could summon, he went through his afternoon's work.

### CHAPTER XVIII

LEWES wasted no time in preliminaries, but told his tale Virginia bluntly, with the whole ridiculous scene in Jones's garden. To his astonishment she laughed until she cried. He had had not the slightest idea that there had been anything comic about the affair, and he felt at first a trifle put out at her poking fun at him. She could not control her laughter for some minutes, and every time he made an effort to start on the next point, which was more important, the poor girl looked at him piteously with streaming eyes and a hand at her side. At last she cried: "Oh, why wasn't I there to faint? Were you both in evening dress? Say yes, say yes!"

"Jenny, you are a perfect ass!" he said, half exasperated and half amused.

"Oh, oh! Be careful how you treat me!" she cried. "I may call on Dr. Jones to stand up for me in the next act."

"Will you listen to reason?"

"If you know any that's not funny."

"Very well, then. He has sworn to stop the story, but he won't be able to do it very well, as you can suppose. The thing for us now and at once to decide is how we're going to act."

"Tell the other story, whatever it is, about Australia?" she asked, her eyes twinkling still roguishly from the effect of her long laugh.

"Nothing of the sort. You know perfectly well," he went on more slowly, "that I should ask you to marry me if you were free. And as I can't do that, perhaps I oughtn't to speak at all. If you were happy and settled I should have kept quiet, but I believe that I could make you happier than you are in a—well, even in an irregular way."

Virginia was still under the influence of her mirth, and still excited in the reaction of her day's suffering. Even at this solemn proposal she could be sprightly. "I am glad you have spoken," she said, "for you were so long about it I thought I should have to speak first."

If she had been a single woman, he would have clasped and kissed her, but he did no more than look at her with extreme admiration, while his face grew red.

- "Then you have been thinking it over," he said.
  - "Indeed, yes. Have you?"
- "You may be sure I have. This affair of Jones's only just hastens it a little, but perhaps that was what was wanted, as you say."
- "And have you thought what our position legally would be?"
- "Yes. I have considered all that. We couldn't be married because the law doesn't call you free."
- "That's so. Have you thought what it would mean for you?"
- "For me professionally? Yes, I've gone into all that too."
- "Well, doesn't that put an end to it?" she asked, still looking at him.
- "No, why should it? I should have to give up this practice here, I suppose, because they wouldn't come to me, and it would be hard on you. And I should have to change my name wherever we were, in case the story followed—as it would be sure to do."
- "Well, then you would lose your degrees?"
- "Yes, I have thought it all out. I should just drop off the Register, and go into practice as an unregistered man."

was that distressed! When she asked me if I should receive you into the house again, and I said I intended to, she nearly choked, and undid collar after collar before she could get a real breath. I wasn't going to help her. When she had taken a good mouthful of the best fresh air, she said she must go out of the house if you came into it again. 'Very good,' I said, 'you will have to scurry along, for she's due by the early train this evening!'" Mrs. Mommery turned the frying potatoes and laughed. "She has been crying on and off all day."

"Serve her right," said Virginia. But though she was thoroughly amused and laughed she was not thoroughly at ease. She made an excuse of going to a cupboard, and with her head inside she asked: "Well, and suppose I did?"

Mrs. Mommery was not unprepared for this. She had hoped that Virginia would tell her before she did such a thing. "Well, and if you did, my dear? Who would blame you?"

"Flolly, I should suppose."

"Oh, yes, of course, all the Flollys of the earth. I mean of decent-minded people."

"You wouldn't, then, mother?"

" No."

Virginia came out of the cupboard carrying the trencher. "No, nor would Daddy Neace. He says that I am free in his eyes—and in his," she added without emotion, and without change of tone; but it was clear whom she meant.

"You are free in mine."

"How brave of you to speak like that, mother! I sometimes think there's more Mommery in me than Yonman, for I haven't a tithe of your courage. I don't know whether I'm one of the Flollys of the earth or not, but I'm not sure that I'm capable——" she broke off short, and when she spoke again, she changed the subject. As the evening had begun so it ended, in pleasant common occupations. They took a hand at cards in front of the kitchen fire, until the latch of the door clicked under Jessie's touch. The servant had called for Miss Mommery at the doctor's, but found her not nearly ready to come away, and the doctor himself had arranged to see her home.

Mrs. Mommery and Virginia went straight to bed, for there was no other fire in the house, and they both needed the rest. But in spite of all the weariness and cheerfulness which should have guaranteed Virginia a good night, she had a very poor one. She tossed and twisted, while throngs of thoughts marched in and out of her tired mind. When she slept, she dreamt of horrors, and was heavy-eyed in the morning. This look hurt Miss Mommery. The poor lady's heart was full of remorse for her action and her suspicions; she herself looked a little snivelly, and when she heard Virginia sigh at breakfast, she burst into tears and left the room. Virginia had no sympathy for her. She said coldly:

"Flolly has a pipe of that emotion laid down in her cellars, I firmly believe." And Mrs. Mommery, who had been a little touched at the sight of her sister-in-law's outburst, now saw it in a comic light.

During the day, Flolly had several such attacks of tears, and on every occasion Mrs. Mommery disappeared at once from her company. She went off to laugh, and when Flolly saw another pair of eyes beside her own red with weeping, she very naturally put it down to a feeling akin to her own, not guessing at the stifled mirth which had forced those tears to light.

# CHAPTER XIX

I

THINK I can write this better than say it, as there are so many things to go into. We can talk later if you think fit. If this were a matter for us two only. I might say yes at a moment, but there are several others to consider. First of all there is he, and I know I should be acting rightly in his eyes if I did say yes. His father says as much too. Then there is mother, and she is the same; she told me outright that in her eyes I am a free woman, in spite of the conventions. I don't suppose I need go into your case, but I must just say that you would be giving up a lot, and would lose far more than I should, in comfort at any rate. I should lose nothing except my reputation among the people in these parts, and all I can do is to weigh my reputation against my freedom and see which is the more important. Even if we had children they would in any case bear my

name, on account of Menna's. My other baby did. But it is children that make the difficulty. I don't feel that I've any right to bring human beings to life until the world is better for them than it is. In our circumstances, we should be making outcasts of them, and even if we have the courage and the choice for being outcasts ourselves, I don't see that we've the right to make other innocent people so. . . . They might care for the conventions. You may say that we should not have children, but I would not take that risk, and in any case I should want to have them.

"I'm sorry you think me slow, but I left this two whole days to see if I could think of anything more.
"VIRGINIA."

H

# "DEAR JENNY,

"You don't take yourself into account at all. Aren't you giving more up by saying no than by saying yes? "Yours, E. C."

#### Ш

"I have thought my own part out thoroughly, of course, but I didn't write it all out for you. But on one side I should have you and a new life full of interests and a con-

sciousness that I was doing right and perhaps making things easier for others who would do the same thing. And on the other side. I have my memories of great joy with him and my life full of old and dear interests and a feeling that I have done the duty the world sets for me. Or if you like better, on one side heroics and on the other humdrum, and I choose the humdrum. I can't pluck up courage, not only for the 'irrevocable step,' but for the necessity of living lies all the time, and I couldn't live away from all my comforts -mother, Menna's, and the Stone. I am far happier now than heaps of people, because I have had so much good in my life, and I shall be far happier all my life, because I can get pleasure out of little things.

"Is this clear enough for you? And do be careful about throwing them in. You very nearly hit Mrs. Dawson's cook in the back with the last.

"VIRGINIA."

IV

# " DEAR JENNY,

"You are a jolly sensible girl. I think I see your point of view—whether it's worth it. Let us go on for a little time and discuss it further then.

"Yours, E.C."

**HOUSE-ROOM** 

306

V

"No, no going on, and no further discussion. If I can't face it now, I shan't be able to later.

"VIRGINIA."



#### CHAPTER XX

HE exchange of these letters was so absorbing to both the young people that they lived a trifle outside the common world while it lasted. When Clewes had received the last, he decided not to answer it for two days or more. They had been slow in every case, not so hurried as the letters themselves suggested. It was now a fortnight since his scene with Dr. Jones, and his dullness ever since that date was enough to give Ridgecombe an idea that some trouble with the Vicar was responsible for the change in Clewes. It was a trial to carry on the same habits when one's thoughts were all so different, but Clewes had no good excuse for altering his, and he still endured eating at the same table with Ridgecombe and suffering his daily conversation, when he had far rather have been thinking to himself. He put up this last letter of Virginia's and went out to his lunch.

"This is a great thing for you, isn't it?"

said Ridgecombe confidentially, when the waiter was away.

- "What's that? Fried cod? Not so bad."
- "You silly ass. Jones I mean."
- "What about him?"
- "Lewis Jones, the rival shop. Bless the man, he's been asleep! Haven't you heard what's happened?"
  - "Not a word. Is he dead?"
- "Wishes he was, I daresay. It's all over the place. It appears that a man came in for market yesterday and got drunk, as they all do, and started boasting that he was Jones's brother. Some chaps at the Mansborough egged him on to speak to Jones, who was in the street at the time, and evidently there was something in the story, for as soon as the man spoke, Jones lost his head and went for him. It's a fact—they had to drag them apart! There was a regular set-to in the street, and this chap is bringing an action for assault."

Clewes paused to hear if there was anything further, then said: "Nothing very offensive, that, to say you are a man's brother."

- "Oh, rather beastly, if you are a drunken farmer, and the other's a gentleman."
  - "Well, and is that all?"
  - "What more do you want?"

"I don't know. It seems such a mild thing to me," said Clewes. "I should be ratty, I daresay, particularly if I had a brother and the drunken gent were he. But I can't imagine blacking his eye for it."

"Temper, I suppose. Well, he's in for a mess now, as this chap is summoning him."

Clewes was greatly interested in this news He went back to the quiet workroom and forgot Virginia, until he saw her smiling over at him. He blushed at his own fickleness, but the blush had no sooner faded than she was again clean out of his memory. He would dearly have liked to hear from others what the drunken man had really said, but he could not inquire, and no one who came to him seemed to know of the incident.

The afternoon was nearly at an end when Clewes heard Ridgecombe asking for him. He went to the head of the stair. "Hallo there! Come up!"

"Are you free? Can you have a talk?"

"I've a patient due now, but she is late. Come up."

As soon as they were inside a closed door, Ridgecombe said, rather excitedly: "Jones is off, leaving the town for good. I don't know what the tales are, but he can't face them. His missus has gone already! He has just been with me. He asked me to come to you. He will sell his house, furniture, equipment, and practice for five hundred cash."

"Good Lord! It's worth three times that!" cried Clewes.

"Yes. I've seen the books this minute. Will you buy?"

"I buy? why should I? I've got a practice."

"Well, someone will."

"Yes, but anyway I shall make during the transfer."

"Well, I'm dashed! I thought you would snap at it. The house alone is worth a thousand. He leaves everything except personal knick-knacks."

"I should love to have the house and garden. There isn't one I like better in the town."

"Well, there you are! With all the rest thrown in. Do you close then?"

"Nonsense. Of course I don't. I haven't got five hundred. I haven't got one hundred. I've got about fifty in cash in the bank and as much more in outstandings."

"I'll get you the money in ten minutes. Mrs. Lamber, the house-agent's widow, will lend like a shot."

- "I've no security."
- "Land save the man! You'll have the house."
  - "I must think it over."
- "Not for long. By the way, Jones told me to come to you. He said he would trust to your generosity, since you had been his best friend."
  - "Damn his impudence."
- "No, seriously, Clewes. He said you had warned him."
  - "Oh! Oh! Yes."
  - "Then I may close with him?"
  - "I must consult someone first."
- "Do it at once, then. And do hurry, there's a good chap. I may warn you that it goes into the market to-morrow and then I shall ask a thousand."
- "Ridgecombe, will you get Virginia Mommery to your place and wait for me? I shall be free by half-past four or soon after."

Ridgecombe had thought she would crop up somewhere. "I'll get her at once," he said, "and expect you then." He scuttled off to fetch Virginia, to tell Jones the matter was as good as settled, and to prepare Mrs. Lamber to have her money at hand.

He managed, with some awkwardness, which

made Virginia blush, to withdraw when Clewes came in. She had been told all that there was to tell, and was ready with her decision as soon as they were alone.

- "This is a good plan for you," she said.

  "Even if another man does come, you will be in the place of honour now."
  - "Am I to take it?"
  - "I should advise you to."
- "I quite agree about its being a splendid opening, as Ridgecombe said, but do I want to open splendidly here?"
  - "You can always sell it at a profit."
- "Yes, that's so. But we might just as well decide that other matter now."
  - "My good man, you have had my letter."
  - "My good girl, you have had my protests."

She reflected that their separation as neighbours would make it easier for them to take up work after this interlude of proposals. He began in the pause to follow the same thought.

- "Perhaps, too, it would be better, if you wanted time to think things over—yes, I know you don't—not to have me always under your eyes."
- "I certainly think that the string and letter business is risky! Someone may have seen it already."

"All right. We'll swear off, and go through the post genteel-like. When you can't see me every day you'll begin to think more highly of me, miss."

Virginia laughed, but her experience taught that they would think less of each other if they were not always being reminded.

Ridgecombe came back, with another furtive delicacy, which irritated Virginia to the extent of her hitting the side of his head. Their meeting broke up; he ran with Clewes to Mrs. Lamber's, and Virginia went back to Hurst, happy that she had said her last word.

#### CHAPTER XXI

IRGINIA had not the wisdom of the serpent, and this means she had found for diverting Clewes's attention from herself had come by chance; but if she had sought no matter where for a way out of her difficulty she could not have found a better. He was now busy beyond anything he had ever He must move house; and it is a great passion which can occupy a man while he is in the midst of such a human tumult. Once he was settled in the superior comfort and prestige of the Georgian house, he must work hard, not only to make enough to keep up this new position, but also to discharge the debt he had made. There was no difficulty in carrying on his practice in the change of condition. The large handsome house attracted people; the disappearance of his rival drove others to him. His work increased, but not more than his income; the highest class of patients, who had almost exclusively gone to Jones, now came to Clewes, and the fees they paid were worth as much as the sunshine of their exalted presence. A new man might set up in the town when he liked; Clewes was in a situation which no rivalry could seriously damage.

These various interests—work, money, change—were fatal to the young man's memory of Virginia. While she went contentedly about her everyday tasks, fighting along the way she had chosen for herself, he forgot that she existed. At times, when he was free of work, and when something particular reminded him of her, he had regrets for the past and hopes for the future; but the hopes were as hazy as the regrets were calm. He had the weakness of the born philanderer; he could be full of fire for a new beauty every day. The healing of their wound, if it were ever such, was thus easily come by-for she had strength to put her desires aside, and he had a heart that fed on change.

She watched him from afar, and the distance grew between them, so that her watching tired, and she looked at what was nearer to her. At last there came a time when she could say her heart was free, and that there was all the more house-room for Arnold left. In her garden by the Stone she had seen the gulf

## 316 HOUSE-ROOM

between herself and this second lover widen, and had let it be. Their happiness was secure—his in success, hers in acceptance, and hers the greater and more invulnerable. The past closed in like a day that is over.

THE END



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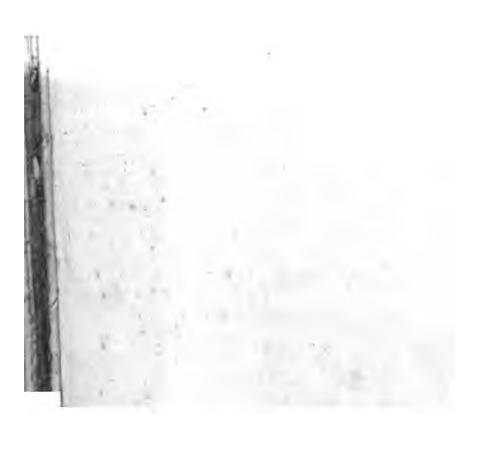
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